

The **World Environment Day** (WED) is celebrated annually since 1974 presents opportunities for reflecting on environment management in the country. The WED 2018 celebrations are globally hosted by India and the theme is, **'Beat plastic pollution.'** In Uganda all events associated with the celebrations are coordinated by the National Environment Authority. The aim for the celebrations is will raise awareness and urge governments, industries, communities, and individuals to come together and explore sustainable alternatives and urgently reduce the production and use of single-use plastic that pollutes oceans, damages marine life and threatens human health. The national celebrations in Uganda will be hosted by Mbale district on June 5th at the Mbale Cricket Grounds, after a series of activities to mark the Environment Week. Thus, the focus is on raising awareness on the dangers of plastics, especially the use of the banned plastic carrier bags, also locally known as "Kaveera" and other issues affecting the Environment.

The demand and use of plastics is common to many Ugandans and hence it's not by surprise that are many industries manufacturing plastics products. The demand for the plastic products is highly likely to increase as the population increases, currently estimated at about 40 million people and projected to be 130 million by 2050. Unfortunately, the majority of the population (especially in the urban & peri-urban areas) is known for poor waste (including plastic) management and disposal.

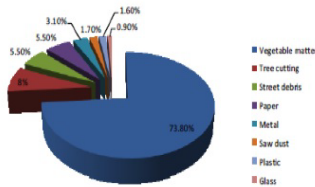


Figure 1: Composition of solid waste generated in Kampala. (Source: KCCA, 2013).



Indiscriminate waste disposal in Kirombe Village, Makindye 1 Parish, Makindye Division, Kampala. Photo by Environmental Alert.

In Kampala City for instance, the daily per capita waste generation is estimated at 1 Kgs. This means that with an estimated day population of 4.5 million people, Kampala generates about 45,000 tons of waste per day! According to Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), about three quarters of the waste generated in the city is organic. The remaining proportion constitutes glass, paper, plastic, metals and other construction waste. Thus, with plastic waste constituting 1.6% (indicated in Figure 1).

Reflection on Practical Actions for Beating Plastic Pollution in Uganda; how can this be achieved?

This waste is collected in these mixed proportions and transported to Kitezi landfill in Wakiso district. It represents only about 40% of the total waste generated in the City, while the remaining uncollected waste is normally burnt and/or dumped in unauthorized sites, causing health and environmental problems (KCCA, 2017). At Kitezi landfill, it's common to see plastic waste pickers (usually women and youth – bboys & girls) collecting it from the landfill and transporting it to recycling plants where they earn 170/= per Kg.

Indiscriminate disposal of waste including plastics has serious implications on environment and public health. For instance: they block drainage channels leading to flooding; they collect stagnant water which becomes a breeding ground for mosquitos which result into disease burden to the people as they incur costs on treating malaria, which affects mainly women and children; poor disposal mechanisms like burning plastics leads to release of dangerous gases which pollute fresh air and contamination of foodstuffs; Plastics such as polythene bags take hundreds of years to decompose and as such pollute our soils, becoming a threat to agriculture which is the backbone of Uganda's economy and by proportion employs 72% of women; they pollute lakes and rivers endangering marine life; they have caused loss of livestock when ingested.

However, all is not lost. Thus, there are various initiatives being implemented at different scales to address the challenges associated with plastic management. Moreover, the experiences in this respect in terms of best practices and lessons learnt must be up-scaled of Uganda as a country is to beat plastic pollution. This requires concerted and coordinated efforts by both State and Non-state actors including the Development Partners, Private Sector and the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The following recommendations should be stepped-up:

- The Government through the line Ministries, City and Urban Authorities should step-up regulation and enforcement of the policies and laws, which guide sustainable management of waste including plastic. Strategies for effective waste management through application of the 3R's should be applied at all scales;
- KCCA's new strategy for plastic waste management in this respect, that involves creation of collection centers to ease collection and transport of the plastics to recycling plants such as the Coca-Cola Beverages Africa plastic waste recycling plant in Nakawa should be supported and up-scaled to other urban towns in the country.
- Community based initiatives and innovations for waste management must be

promoted and supported, for they turn waste including plastic into valuable products which create employment and generate incomes while cleaning up the environment;

- CSOs and networks should continuous engage the Government through providing alternative research based policy and practice recommendation to influence decision making and investments for sustainable waste management along the waste generation chain at levels; and
- All Ugandans are encouraged to change their attitudes and practices in respect to waste management so that they can generate less waste and also take responsibility in its management and disposal at the source where its generated through waste sorting, recycling and re-using. This requires more targeted awareness and education of all stakeholders.

Some of the initiatives in this regard are: the Government's ban on importation, manufacture and use of polythene bags of gauge below 30 microns in 2009. NEMA's efforts to enforce the ban have been adequately/effectively implemented due to the pressure from private sector involved in the production of plastic products. The lobbying, awareness and advocacy role that is consistently pursued by the civil society in Uganda for promotion of alternatives to plastic and supporting of the Government's ban on production and use of polythene below 30 microns. Furthermore, the Environment and Natural resources CSOs in Uganda have supported community based initiatives that have promoted the 3 R's (i.e. reduce, recycle and reuse) concepts and principles to waste management along the generation value chain. In this process, waste including plastic is turned into useful products such as crafts, floor/roofing tiles, composite wood and furniture such as chairs, tables and beds through innovation.

The Private sector players like the Coca-Cola Beverages Africa Uganda presents opportunity for recycling plastics for conversion into useful products. This plant receives about 300,000 metric tonnes of plastic waste from within and around Kampala. Initiatives by the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project have supported KCCA in maintenance of Nakivubo channel; increasing public awareness on proper solid waste management and popularization of the solid waste management ordinance; and the construction and equipping a model garbage recycling center which employs women and youths (girls and boys) in recycling plastics and making manure and fertilizers from waste.



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