



PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA: WEBINAR SUMMARY AND REPORT

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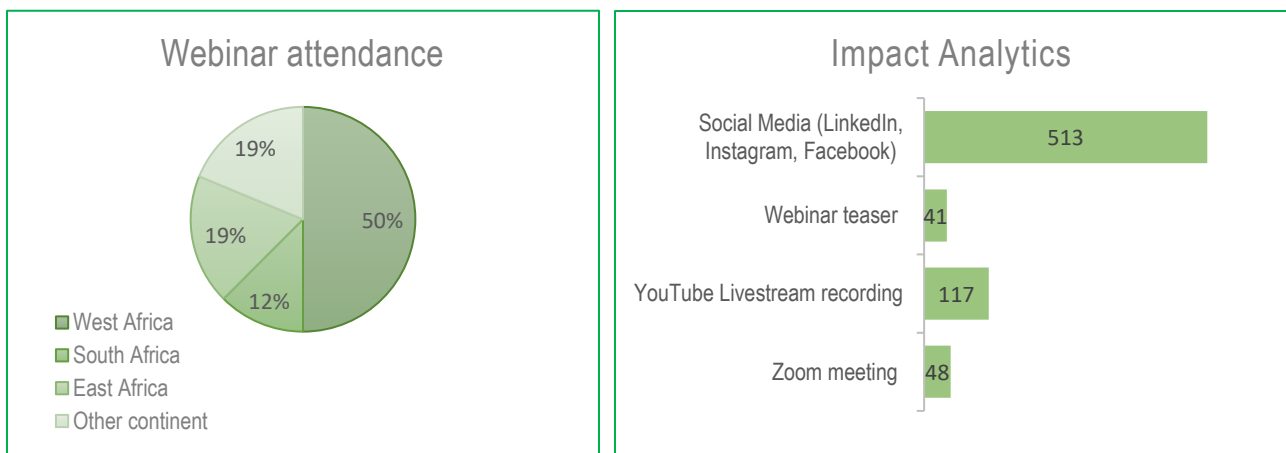
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SUMMARY

Plastics account for most waste dumped worldwide: approximately 130 million metric tons in 2019 - virtually all of which is burned, buried in landfills, or tossed straight into the environment. The expense of managing plastic waste across Africa is tremendous because it is the most likely to end up in our rivers and oceans, where it accounts for nearly all visible pollution, ranging hundreds of thousands of metric tons annually in Africa. These plastics degrade into microparticles that influence aquatic life and human health, as well as the ocean's ability to store carbon. Plastic production might account for five to ten per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 if current rates of increase are maintained without adequate management. Therefore, in this webinar, we assessed and discussed the socio-demographic dimensions relating to the ban, control, and management of plastic wastes in Africa by proffering technical solutions towards its decline soon. This is proposed to help examine policies to understand the magnitude of the opportunities, and the tangible benefits to stakeholders, including shareholders, of using and managing plastic in an environmentally sustainable way across Africa.

The geographical distribution of attendees and our reach analytics.



Webinar Recording is available on [YouTube](#).

Acknowledgements

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BACKGROUND OF PLASTIC WASTE ISSUES IN AFRICA

Eco Amet Solutions - AFRICER project

As an Environmental Services and Consulting private company in Ghana, Eco Amet Solutions has been involved in policies to improve lives in the local communities across Africa through good health initiatives, encouraging good sanitation provision, and promoting access to safe drinking water and environmental sustainability program. Over the years, Eco Amet Solution services have been overwhelmingly received in Ghana, and extending the benefits to an African continental scale became imperative. Consequently, Eco Amet Solutions, early this year, invited independent researchers with expertise in different aspects of environmental sustainability to form the AFRICER project.

The need for a panel of discussions program as part of the AFRICER project

Plastic pollution is expected to worsen in the next decade due to rising global production and usage and the prevalence of plastic waste mismanagement. Microplastic pollution provides a substantial ecological risk to lacustrine ecosystems, given that most African countries have agro-based economies and rapidly growing populations. Furthermore, while fibres and pieces were the most prevalent, microplastic pellets are the most prevalent in African lakes.

The AFRICER project leader, in his opening remarks, highlighted that plastic pollution is a pervasive and growing environmental problem in Africa as recent studies have shown that despite the ban on the use of single plastic across 34 countries in Africa, African countries still import and use 230 million tons of plastics annually which is mostly poorly managed. This places the African continent with the highest plastic burden in the environment globally. Therefore, to

address the plastic pollution challenges in Africa through alternative means other than the ban on single-use plastics, the webinar was organised to discuss and suggest a framework for plastic waste policies and management across the African continent. Specifically, in this webinar, we intend to (i) discuss the different current plastic waste management and policy frameworks across African countries; (ii) examine the best legislative and regulatory models, methods, and practices that have helped to manage correctly and prevent plastic pollution in any of the African countries; (iii) assess the feasibility through a plenary session of the applicability and implementations of such model(s) across other African countries for plastic pollution management; (iv) discuss a proposed model of proper management and prevention of plastic pollution that will include the local communities.

To help address the issues of the webinar on the ban of single-use plastic and plastic pollution, the team for the panel of discussions comprising three guests was introduced. They included (i) Gloria Majiga-Kamoto from the Environmental Policy Advocate Group in Malawi; (ii) Juvenal Mukurarinda, who is a Senior Officer at the Sustainable Waste Management Group of the Global Green Growth Institute, Rwandan Country Program; and (iii) Bezawit Eshetu of the African Circular Economy Network.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEBINAR

Opening statements on the topic of discussion by the guests

One of the three panellists, Ms Gloria Majiga-Kamoto, started the conversation by discussing **factors to consider before a country bans single-use plastics**. Ms Majiga-Kamoto acknowledged the revolutionary nature of plastics as a material and its solutions for human's everyday needs. She, however, clearly indicated that the increased production of plastics and the lack of proper management makes plastics extremely unsustainable; hence, the need to ban single-use plastics globally. She noted that globally in 2015, over 55% of produced plastics were discarded, 25% incinerated, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, and only 20% were recycled.

On banning single-use plastics, Gloria indicated that her country, Malawi, became only the 15th country in 2015 to introduce a ban. She explained three main factors that need to be considered when banning plastics in African countries, including:

1. Establishing systems, including an institutional framework to support and enforce bans. For example, ensuring that confiscated plastics are not re-introduced into a country's market requires effective plans;
2. Closing porous geographical boundaries/borders that allow transboundary movement of plastics from countries that haven't banned plastics to those with bans in place. Thus, governments should work together to manage single-use plastics; and
3. Providing alternatives to plastics. Without other options produced in a country banning plastics or reliably sourcing them from another country, issuing a ban cannot be effective.

Following Gloria's opening statement, Mr Juvenal Mukurarinda provided his perspectives on **making policies on plastic waste a reality**. Mr Mukurarinda

indicated that the need to develop policies on plastics was essential considering the threats that plastics pose to biodiversity, destruction of soils, and harm to animals. He underscored the need to provide education and information on policies as critical to making policies on plastics a reality. More specifically, Juvenal explained that to make policies a reality, countries need to:

1. Frame policies to capture all aspects of the plastics value chain;
2. Disseminate information from the central to local levels with clear roles and responsibilities to stakeholders;
3. Connect the benefits of policies to regional, district, and household levels;
4. Create sustainable markets for recyclables;
5. Develop programs with clearly identified outcomes and straightforward actions and roadmaps in dealing with plastics; and
6. Continuous research on the environmental impacts of plastics

He bemoaned the lack of understanding and knowledge on the impacts of plastic waste on the environment as contributing to the failures of policies.

Ms Bezawit Eshetu delivered the final opening statement on implementing a plastic circular economy at the community level. In her remarks, Bezawit indicated that plastics are relatively lightweight, durable, and not expensive and, as a result, have replaced most items used at the household level. She indicated that the cost of not acting is dire, with long-term adverse effects. To achieve a plastic circular economy, she offered the following points:

1. Develop markets that environmentally-conscious consumers drive;
2. Encourage innovation to explore alternative materials;
3. Using existing successful brands to promote circular economy products;
4. Providing incentives for circular economy products and prototypes; and

5. Encouraging small environmentally conscious efforts. For example, not purchasing items that are not needed.

The discussion session

How can single-use plastic bans be adapted and enforced within African countries?

Governments worldwide are becoming increasingly aware of the magnitude of the plastic pollution problem. On the other hand, most African countries have made little or no effort to guarantee that the ban on single-use plastics is adopted and enforced. AFRICER recently hosted a webinar on plastic waste management in Africa, and the following are some of the suggestions that came up during the discussion.

1. **Assess the impacts (positive and negative):**

Governments need to check the assessment of the issues around plastic waste and the challenges such as cleanliness, water quality, human health, air quality, agricultural productivity, safety for drainage issues, and safety of packaged food caused by plastic waste pollution. In addition to the environmental impacts, the economic and social impacts must be assessed as well. In addition to the challenges. Governments must weigh the concerns and know where to start.

In the case study of Rwanda, they started by banning carrying bags (60 mm thickness). Also, they mapped the areas where carrying bags were produced and then put stringent measures to ban their production. Then, alternative use was also looked at, for example, paper bags, bamboo bags, and many other alternatives. The parliament also passed a ban on manufacturing polythene bags between 2008-2019. Enforcement was necessary, and companies that went contrary were fined or jailed between 6-12 months. Countries like Burkina, Senegal, Senegal, and Ghana have come to Rwanda to learn from them.

In Malawi, the ban was started in 2015. A two-year timeline was given for companies to look at other

alternatives to replace plastic use. However, the government has not implemented these laws effectively due to sponsorship packages received from these plastic manufacturers during political campaigns, etc. Also, plastic manufacturers formed a coalition and sent the government to court. It is quite a complex issue, especially when the plastic issue is a supply issue, not a demand issue. There are few to no alternatives available; even when they are, it is much more expensive than plastic products. Civil society organisations educate the citizens to let them know the dire consequences of extensive plastic waste.

In Ethiopia, people were encouraged to store the plastic waste they produced, such as polythene bags, sanitary products, plastic bottles, among others, for about a month. Halfway into this project, most people admitted that they could not continue because their homes had been engulfed in plastic waste. The lessons were learned even before this pilot exercise was ended. The project sought to make dire practical effects of extensive plastic products.

2. **The use of the media:** Policymakers and civil society organisations must raise public awareness about the harm caused by single-use plastics. Detailed and relevant information must be given to the citizens to encourage them to know the various alternatives that can be used in place of single used plastics. This will ensure public support to get politicians to make the right decisions regarding banning single-use plastics. After all, most people know the negative impact of the extensive use of plastics and their effect on the environment.

3. **Reducing taxes and providing incentives:**

Governments must consider tax rebates and other conditions to support transitions in using alternative products to replace single-use plastics. Tax exemptions would go a long way to make their products less expensive. However, governments will face resistance from the plastic industry if they are not given ample time to adapt. Waste management must

be driven by the state and not the private sector alone. The political will is the most important thing.

4. Enforcement and Implementation: Banning plastics is a long way from ending; hence governments must continue to engage all stakeholders to develop solutions that would work and create a win-win situation for all parties. Also, there must be a clear allocation of roles and responsibilities. To ensure its success, implementation and enforcement are very necessary.

Which alternative strategies can be employed in plastic waste management? Case studies/what has and hasn't worked?

To achieve the goal of adequately managing plastic waste across the African continent, the webinar discussed proposed alternatives that can help reduce the plastic burden while considering the difference in the way of life of the local people across Africa. Some of the alternatives discussed included; (i) encouraging research and innovation that will involve the local people as stakeholders to produce eco-friendly products to replace the current single-used plastics; (ii) introducing and encouraging incentives for all stakeholders involved in activities that seek to reduce plastic burden in the environment; (iii) re-assess the actual plastic waste value chain in Africa to enact and enforce of regulations that will transfer plastic clean-up responsibilities to the producers; (iv) increase the campaigns on plastic waste management to the local communities, and also involve them in the clean-up initiatives to increase the awareness on plastic waste management; (v) activate and encourage a holistic approach that will involve the informal stakeholders in developing and enforcing plastic waste management strategies.

How do you deal with political interference associated with developing plastic waste bans and enforcement?

1. The media plays an essential role in influencing, educating, and bringing the message down to the

level of the ordinary citizen, and this is very important in getting the nation on the same page.

2. The political discussion needs to be shared among the local government (District, cities, and communities) to involve the local people. The local people can then share their needs, concerns, and priorities.
3. The government could consider subsidising alternative materials before implementing and enforcing these policies to prepare the market and supply chain system.
4. Plastic waste bans and their enforcement demands a well-structured system from top to down involving all necessary stakeholders right before the initial step through to the enforcement. The government's political will is essential to economic, ecological, and national development. This played a crucial role in Rwanda's case.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on all issues discussed, what should be the next steps?

Panellists challenged individuals and countries to rethink plastic waste and management priorities.

Expressly, they indicated that there is a need to:

Galvanise support to create a continental level community of learning to share information and data about plastic policies, management strategies, and bans;

Think about regional policies on plastic bans to make bans effective.

Sharing success stories and challenges with other countries to assist them to develop and enforce their bans

Take small feasible steps to support innovation in countries.

Closing statements from AFRICER

The panel discussion brought out essential strategies which will be very useful to the continent of Africa if well implemented; here are a few highlights;

1. Education plays an essential role in every strategy we adopt in plastic waste management.
2. Every strategy adapted by a country needs to be well structured and well-thought throw using the top-to-down and down-to-top approaches, including grassroots practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key lessons learned and recommendations from the webinar

The webinar discussed and proposed solutions to the current gap in knowledge, challenges, and problems of plastic waste management in Africa. Some of the proposed solutions aim to connect the skilled, informal, and practical approaches to create social inclusion through networks of different initiatives to reduce the plastic waste burden across the African continent. In addition, the approach of collaborating and partnering with interested individuals, co-operating organisations, or companies should be encouraged as championed by the AFRICER project of the Eco Amet Solution.

APPENDIX I

Webinar chatroom – highlights

[Charles Alphonso Zinnah] My opinion is that before banning plastic, there should be a proper strategy in place for recycling, reuse, plastic population awareness and other possible alternatives to replace single-use plastics. Without these strategies, the ban won't be implemented

[Tadele Assefa Aragaw] Personal protective equipment (PPE) pollution driven by the COVID-19 pandemic along the shoreline of Lake Tana, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia- DOI: 10.1016/j.scitotenv.2022.153261.

The macro-debris pollution in the shorelines of Lake Tana: First report on abundance, assessment, constituents, and potential sources. DOI: 10.1016/j.scitotenv.2021.149235.

Current plastics pollution threats due to COVID-19 and possible mitigation techniques: a waste-to-energy conversion via Pyrolysis. DOI: 10.1186/s40068-020-00217-x

[Joshua Ekye] I will like to thank the organisers of this educative program. In my opinion, and using Ghana as a case study, all the necessary policies and measures needed to ban single-use plastics will be proposed, but due to POLITICISATION, all efforts will be in vain.

[Godfred Dzantor] So the question is, how can we overcome the barriers of political influences to ban plastics? Because they are our worst nightmares.

[Davidson Malison] The challenges of policies available in Nigeria are largely hinged on politics, especially in the aspect of political parties. How can that be solved?

[Perk Pomeyie] Our consumerist nature as users of plastic products and the capitalist nature of producers and corporations needs to be considered. Less consumption of plastics will drive producers to limit production, which I call consumer power.

[Joshua Ekye] I think the political issues can be addressed by involving the politicians in formulating scientific policies.

[Solomon] The ban might work to some extent; however, we need other sustainable waste management options. How about the second round of recycled plastics and more? Because the quality is also downgraded, as we know. Recycling and incineration don't work.

[Charles Alphonso Zinnah] Some countries that depend heavily on single plastic can't directly impose bans but can impose regulations first and, after implementation, move slowly to the stage of banning. So my main is to know the government's standing.

[Isimbi Aubine Esther] Question: They mentioned in the short video that an incineration plant is a nasty business but doesn't it transform plastics into electricity and heat? Isn't this a form of recycling or waste-to-energy?

[Tadele Assefa Aragaw] As you may know, when discussing a plastic ban, enforce to use of biodegradable plastic. In this context, there a controversial issue has also come to us, and several discussions by scientists in this regard are recent attractive attention. What do you say about this?

[Adebisi Jaiyeola] So far, the single-use plastics ban seems to be the popular policy? How effective has the single-use ban been? Is a single-use ban enough? Do we have data to support the effectiveness of a single-use ban?

[Olatokunbo Ige] Waste management is better off as a PPP. But, like most issues on the social agenda, we all need to play a role.

[Davidson Malison] The experts in Plastic Recycling have to create the much-needed awareness in terms of significance, effects and demerits.

[Olatokunbo Ige] Alternatives to plastics exist already; I think it's investing in sensitising our people / changing mindset that we should also push for. Once my mama in the market gets something else that's cheaper in her hand, she will abandon plastic.

Yes, we definitely need continuous research ... and that speaks to what one of the speakers said, we need many actors to join our "campaigns."

Emphasis on the economic advantages of getting involved in clean environmental ups.... the valorisation of waste-based products by society should be prioritised. In our little experience, we see that the potential for creating employment for youth and developing innovative products is not being given enough publicity... it's not just about media, and it's about having official champions from leadership ... a minister ready to announce that he's using furniture made from recycled tyres, for example, Rwanda...

Changing mindset takes time private sector actors must be willing to stay the course... I think we should also network more often, like this, to share experiences and encourage one another.... the COPs are essential.... but the discussions must increase internally.

[David-AFRICER] We will continue this conversation on the Green Living Chats podcast (our weekly podcast where we discuss emerging environmental issues and solutions): <https://glcpodcast.ecoametsolutions.com/>. You are all invited to listen. If you would like to be interviewed or engage with the podcast, please email us via glcpodcast@ecoametsolutions.com. Thanks.

[Abdulazeez Subair] I have been an advocate of a sustainable Circular economy in Nigeria. So I am delighted to join this session. There is presently a challenge going on in Lagos, Nigeria, about the circular economy. It's all for the sole purpose of ensuring circularity and sustainability, which indeed involves plastics and plastic wastes.

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