

Burning plastic killing us slowly

By Gerald Tenywa

The blue-grayish smoke keeps Amelia Kagere busy as she waves her tiny hands to keep it away from her face. It is early in the morning and Kagere is firmly strapped on her mother's back who is lighting a charcoal stove with some of the plastic bags that litter their homestead in Kasokoso, Kireka, Wakiso district.

Kagere's mother does not know that burning plastic bags creates a much bigger problem. So, every weekend, she picks up any plastics her hands can land on and keeps them in one corner of her two roomed house.

"It has become easy to light the charcoal stove. I simply light the plastic bags under the charcoal on the stove," Ann Nantongo, Kagere's mother says.

Burning plastic bags is dangerous as they release toxic fumes that lead to impotence and birth defects among both human beings and animals, Dr David Ogaram, an expert in toxicology has revealed.

Ogaram points out that dangerous chemicals; dioxins and furans are produced when materials containing chlorine are exposed to heat.

He said globally, dioxins and furans are listed among the 12 deadliest chemicals, referred to as the dirty dozen or Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The POPs are

toxic because they have the ability to damage and kill living organisms.

Other complications that can arise from exposure to Persistent Organic Pollutants are cancer and skin and teeth defects. He also said dioxins and furans affect the endocrine system, which produces hormones that influence biological and chemical reactions in the body.

Ogaram noted that most people and public institutions, particularly the health and urban authorities, get rid of waste by burning it.

"Burning plastic waste is a case of overcoming one problem and creating even a bigger one," Ogaram said.

"The toxic fumes also affect wild animals and accumulate in the fatty tissues of fish and red meat," he added.

"Uganda lacks a specific policy that deals with Persistent Organic Pollutants. The Government is silent on how to deal with pollutants," Ogaram said.

Dr Tom Okurut, the executive director of NEMA said the implementation of existing policies like the ban on plastic bags was failing because of lack of political will.

Activists on environment have been questioning why the policy to eliminate plastic bags was working in Rwanda, but has failed in Uganda.

About a decade ago, Uganda imposed a ban on plastic bags but the intervention is yet to bear any fruit.



In Rwanda, where the plastic bag ban has been reinforced, bread is packaged in bio-degradable wax paper

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"We still see *buvuera* all over and people are still waiting for the Government to enforce the ban," Nicholas Ssenyonjo, the executive director of the Uganda Environment Education Foundation, said.

At the same meeting, Silver Sebagala from the Cleaner Production Centre said waste management strategies supported by a policy on waste management and enforcement should be put in place.

"The biggest source of the dangerous fumes is poor waste mismanagement," he said, adding that the population was relying on burning waste as a way of getting rid of waste.

Moses Musoke, a resident of Kakajo Zone in Bweyogerere, Wakiso district, pointed out that the population has a negative attitude of 'waste not in my backyard'. So, they throw waste anywhere so long as it is out of their compound.

There is need for people like Nantongo to know about the dangers of plastic waste and stop burning it. The incoming local councils could provide a breath of fresh air by ensuring that people clean up the environment and avoid burning the waste. They could also have a policy of separation of waste into bio-degradable and non-biodegradables to ensure that urban residences are not buried in waste.

The biodegradable could be used as manure to support urban farming or manure for gardening. The plastic bags could be rolled together to form a lump or a ball. This will reduce the space occupied by plastic bags and reduce the amount of litter in the environment.

Even without the Government implementing its bans on plastics, self-help initiatives should be encouraged by people's organisations (civil society organisations), religious groups, and cultural institutions.

The people also have the power to say no to plastics. They can move with cloth bags that can be used for a long time. Why should people wait for the Government to deal with waste, yet they are the biggest losers from the use of plastics.

Rotarians wage war on degradation

By Mathias Mazinga

When he was elected into office (for Rotary year 2017/2018), Kenneth Mugisha, the governor of Rotary District 9211 (which covers Uganda and Tanzania), introduced Mission Green project, aimed at promoting the conservation of the environment by planting trees.

Mugisha intended to reduce the adverse effects of climate change and empower communities to uphold the sanctity of the environment.

Rotarians responded actively to Mugisha's pro-environment theme project and, under the umbrella of their respective clubs, they started planting trees in various communities.

The Rotary Club of Muyenga Sunday Sunset took the campaign to schools like St Charles Lwanga Senior Secondary School Kibiri in Wakiso district, which in addition to tree planting, also sensitised and empowered the students and community to champion the cause of environment preservation.

Meanwhile, Muyenga Rotary Club dedicated its vocational service award to Joseph Masembe, an internationally acclaimed environment activist.



Members of the Rotary Club of Muyenga Sunday Sunset planting trees with the students of St Charles Lwanga Senior Secondary School Kibiri in Wakiso district recently

Rotarian Robin Kibuuka, the chairman of the club's vocational service committee, said of Masembe: "Our nominee is the founder and chief executive officer of the hugely successful *My Kid is a Superstar* and *Little Hands go Green* movements. Through the two organisations, he is at the helm of strategic environment activism.

"He has been working with young people to promote environment conservation through planting trees. He has broadened his vision and mission by collaborating

with NEMA and schools like Kampala International School and Rainbow Academy, VIVO Energy and the Government. He planted trees at Kololo Independence Grounds with President Yoweri Museveni.

"He also represented Uganda at the 6th Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa. In 2004, he undertook a research project and produced a report on the social environment accountability of the Uganda extractive industry," Kibuuka said.



the Jane Goodall Institute

27 YEARS OF THE JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE IN UGANDA



Dr. Peter Apell
Acting Executive Director

"I'm determined my great grandchildren will be able to go to Africa and find wild great apes." — Dr. Jane Goodall

This statement briefly presents the raison d'être of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) for wildlife and habitat conservation, research and education: we exist to reverse the decline in the population of Great Apes and to preserve their habitats. Grounded in the legacy of Dr. Jane Goodall's 56 years of chimpanzee research and advocacy, JGI is committed to addressing the complex issues that threaten chimpanzees in the wild, while meeting the needs of the surrounding affected communities.

History of JGI in Uganda

Our primary interest is the conservation of the endangered chimpanzee as well as the welfare of those recovered from captivity. We work with the Uganda Wildlife Authority, Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Uganda Wildlife Education Centre, Wildlife Clubs of Uganda, National Forestry Authority, Ministry of Education and many others in our efforts to protect the diminishing chimpanzee populations of Uganda. JGI Uganda has been a registered foreign NGO since 1996.

JGI mission, values and objectives

The Jane Goodall Institute builds on Jane Goodall's scientific work and her humanitarian vision. Our mission is to preserve Great Apes and their habitats by combining conservation

with education and promotion of sustainable livelihoods in local communities. At JGI, we work to expand non-invasive research programmes on chimpanzees and other primates.

We also aim to improve global understanding and treatment of Great Apes through research, public education and advocacy, and create a worldwide network of young people who have learned to care deeply for humanity, all animals and the environment, and who will take responsible action.

We strive to respect, nourish and protect all living things. We believe that knowledge leads to understanding, and that understanding will encourage us to take action. Every individual has the ability to make a positive difference, with a flexible and open-minded attitude to a changing world. We require integrity and compassion in all that we do and say.

JGI's work in Uganda

JGI's focal landscapes in Uganda are the tropical rain forests (chimpanzee habitat forests) located in the Albertine Rift. Our rolling program areas include: Protecting Great Apes and Other Primates by supporting sanctuaries, law enforcement efforts to reduce illegal trafficking and public education to protect endangered species in the wild.

We work towards ensuring a Healthy Habitat and balance between the ecosystem's ability to support human needs whilst sustaining the other animals who share the landscape. We restore degraded and/or depleted forest landscapes as well as vital corridors that form a network of community/private forests and national protected areas that connect communities of chimpanzees, improving genetic viability of the species across its entire range.

Critical in achieving lasting conservation outcomes, is the need to balance conservation objectives and socio-economic needs. Accordingly, we promote Sustainable Livelihoods through improved agricultural practices; establishing community-managed enterprises and microcredit programs, and

sustainable production techniques that increase incomes while protecting forests. We are piloting innovative community-based mechanisms for incentivising conservation and mitigating conflict such as a quasi-insurance scheme that is anchored on a community-based and financed mechanism to compensate for losses and/or damage from wildlife.

Our work also focuses on protecting watersheds to improve ground water recharge that feed wells and streams that are a vital lifeline for household use and agriculture. Furthermore, to ensure healthy communities and ecosystems we install centrally located sources for potable water as well as promote the installation of safer, smoke-free and more efficient wood-burning stoves.

Our Conservation Education and Roots & Shoots Programs focus on nurturing young children to become tomorrow's conservation stewards. In order to enhance this goal, we work the Ministry of Education and the National Curriculum Development Centre to integrate environmental education into the National School Curriculum; we also work with schools to impart practical eco-social skills to students including tree planting, paper recycling, waste disposal, hygiene etc. Our Peer-to-Peer program aims to keep the girl child in school through counselling, scholastic material support, and menstrual sanitary kit support to the most disadvantaged girl students in selected schools in our target landscape.

In support of all the above, we leverage cutting-edge technology to track and monitor our impact through information crowdsourcing – electronic data gathering, storage and analysis platforms are installed on hand-held devices that are placed in the hands of our on-ground stakeholders (students, teachers, community members, government officials etc.) to help them generate near real time actionable information to ensure timely decision making.

As we build on these and numerous other achievements at the Jane Goodall Institute – Uganda, we would like to take a moment to celebrate the milestones.