



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: kick plastic bags out!

Plastic bags are commonly used to carry items from shops. They are provided by the shops and often include the name or logo of the shop on it. The idea is to distinguish them from other shops. For instance, Spar supermarkets have different plastic bags than Shoprite.

The rise of shopping malls in Zambia has brought with it an increase in the use of plastic bags.

In fact, there has been some debate in Parliament about regulating plastic bags, but so far there has been no legislation.

There have also been initiatives aimed at encouraging people to recycle their plastic bags. That is, people are asked to bring their old plastic bags back to the supermarkets and other shops for re-use.

Similar efforts have been made to encourage people to recycle their plastic bottles.

This is particularly important in these hot days of October as more and more people drink lots and lots of water from plastic bottles. So, it would be good to recycle!

The Weekly Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Challenges in Managing Plastic Bags and Bottles

Plastic bag management is something that hasn't gotten a lot of attention in Zambia – and it should. Plastic is a danger to the environment because when it is burned it can release toxins, such as sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere.

Sulfur dioxide is dangerous to human beings. This is because inhalation of these toxic gases causes breathing problems. A weakened respiratory system can trigger other diseases.

Consequently, the manufacture of plastic bags contributes to the diminishing availability of our natural resources and damages the environment.

Another problem is proper disposal.

Plastic bags and bottles are often thrown about creating litter – and other times they are tossed into drainage ditches – clogging the flow of water. This contributes to flooding – particularly around the markets.

For instance, just visit the Lusaka city market. There are few places to dispose of trash – so much of the plastic bags and bottles wind up on the ground or in ditches.

Plastic takes a long time to decompose in the soil. This can make it difficult for plants and trees to grow.

Plastic bags are also blown into trees and crops and can be mistaken for food or even flowers by animals.

Once eaten, the bags can kill animals – stopping up their digestive systems.

Activities for Journalists

The debate about regulating plastic products has been going on for years in Zambia. Just last year, Parliament raised points on how plastic can be controlled.

One parliamentarian suggested charging an extra fee to customers who want to use plastic bags from shops. For instance, if a customer purchases goods and wants to use a plastic bag then the customer would pay an extra fee. This fee would then be used to create a fund to cover the cost of cleaning up plastics from the environment.

There have been organizations such as Youth for the Environment Network that been calling for use of biodegradable bags. These bags would be an alternative to the plastic bags that have dominated the market. One of the outlets that have promoted the use of biodegradable bags is KFC stores. They use paper bags. These bags are not harmful to the environment because they decompose quickly in the soil.

Initiatives such as the reuse of plastic bags and bottles need to be strongly encouraged. The key is to offer alternatives and let people know that plastic is not environmental-friendly. These campaigns must be never-ending.

There's also a need to sensitize retail shops about the harmful effects of plastic products – for instance, they should encourage customers to recycle their plastic bags.

The city council needs to encourage public transports to place convenient trash bins in their buses so that passengers don't toss their trash out the windows.

Although there are regulations in place, many public transit vehicles don't have trash bins. City council could fine these public transport companies – creating a greater incentive to follow the rules.

This regulation can be further strengthened by creating a closer partnership between the local government, police and the road safety and transport agency.

There is also need to promote the culture of buying baskets that are made from cloth and bamboo. The advantage of these bags is that they can be used over and over again, are very strong and decompose easily.

Have a discussion about the hazards that plastic bags cause to the environment. What can you do to reduce the plastic in your community?

Do you know anyone who has stopped using plastic bags? Interview them. What sort of entrepreneurial opportunities might be created by a ban on plastic bags?

Interview the council authorities on how they are managing the disposal of plastic? Are there any initiatives to recycle plastic?

Create public service announcements encouraging people to recycle their plastic bags and bottles.

Useful Link

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