

# The Weekly

## Information Resource Bulletin

### FOCUS: Banning Plastic Bags

In August, the government of Malawi, through the Department of Environmental Affairs banned the importation, production and distribution of thin plastic bags.

This move to ban plastic bags came during a panel discussion organized by the Environmental Department in Lilongwe – in an effort to protect the environment.

However, the ban has been put on hold by the courts.

In this week's bulletin, we discuss the dangers of thin plastic bags and their alternatives.

Most people in Malawi use plastic bags for their shopping, without realizing the harm it has on the environment.

### The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To learn from other listeners on what Malawians can do to take care of the environment.
- To understand the effects of plastic papers to the environment
- To give journalists tips and guidance on their reporting on the dangers of plastic papers to the environment

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### The Problem: Plastic Bags Create an Eyesore and Harm the Environment

Plastic bags are made from a non-renewable natural resource: petroleum. Consequently, the manufacture of plastic bags contributes to the diminishing availability of our natural resources and damages the environment from the extraction of petroleum.

When plastics are being manufactured, they emit considerable amounts of pollution.

According to the Natural Environment website, 60 to 100 million barrels of oil are required to manufacture a year's worth of plastic bags worldwide, and it takes approximately 400 years for a plastic bag to decompose.

The impact of plastic bags on the environment is enormous. For instance, there's the litter problem.

Plastic bags blowing across the landscape create an ugly and unhygienic scene. They also can clog waterways – creating drainage problems and ultimately – flooding.

Apart from causing soil deterioration and drain blockages, plastic bags cause digestive blockages for cattle, birds and fish.

Plastic bags are also blown into trees and other crops and plants and can be mistaken for food or even flowers by animals. Once eaten, the bags can kill animals.

Plastic bags break down, but they never biodegrade. As a result, any toxic additives they contain—including flame retardants and antimicrobials -- will be released into the environment. Many of those toxins directly affect the environment.

## Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand that plastic bags are bad for the environment and that there are alternatives.

Make the following points:

It is better to use a bag made from cotton than one made from plastic to carry your items.

Plastic bags are the cause of major environmental concerns. Statistics show that we are consuming more and more plastics every year. It is estimated that an average individual uses around 130 plastic bags per year.

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1974750.stm>)

As mentioned, there are alternatives to plastic bags that are environmental friendly.

You can choose to use a reusable carry bag, which are already on the market, and they are being sold at 35 Kwacha. A plastic basket or one made from bamboo –*bango* could also be used as an alternative. These baskets are also locally available.

In this bulletin, we will focus on bags made from cloth *chitenje*. Cloth bags offer

an earth friendly alternative to plastic bags. Cloth bags reduce the amount of waste we generate that ultimately winds up in landfills.

Cloth bags are strong, durable and cost effective- since they can be reused. They are thicker which makes them strong enough to be used over and over again. They are locally available in different sizes and shapes

Have a discussion with about the hazards that plastic bags cause to the environment. What as a community, could you do to make sure that plastic bags don't pollute the environment?

Conduct an interview with Dr. Aloysius Kamperewera of the Department of the Environmental Affairs under the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, about the dangers of plastic bags to the environment and what Malawians can do to take care of their environment.

Do you know anyone who has stopped using plastic bags? What sort of entrepreneurial opportunities might be created by a ban on plastic bags – that is, local, small businesses might make recyclable bags.

### Useful Contacts

- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change; Dr. Aloysius Kamperewera; +2651772428
- Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy; Tel: +265 (0) 212 700 104
- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1974750.stm>
- [www.algalita.org](http://www.algalita.org)



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