



ENVIRONMENT

Covid-19 fuelling the resurgence of single-use plastics

POLLUTION



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Africa is a world leader in outlawing plastic bags with 34 out of 52 countries having bans, or passed the legislation to ban single-use plastics. Inasmuch the current Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented, it has been occasioned by the incredible endorsement of single-use plastics, particularly those used in medical appliances.

Lately, there has been an upsurge of single-use plastics in food

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packaging that is perceived to be convenient specifically for take-away or fast-food applications by restaurants and food markets. Urban consumers are increasingly using plastic food and drink containers, lids, cutlery, stirrers and straws insistently only to become waste just a few minutes later.

Despite the global disruptions in the supply chains that have precipitated a slowdown in exports of consumer goods, exports are still being protected with plastic bags while on transit. The assumption is that consumers prefer them wrapped in plastics, but in a real sense this cannot be defensible. The big question that we need to ask ourselves is, is the Covid-19 pandemic a justification enough for the surge in the adoption of single-use plastics? Is this suitable for our environment? It's documented that cutback in the usage of plastic bags has two benefits: it diminishes the creation of waste considerably, which drifts and ends up in the world's oceans,

injuring marine life, and it diminishes the air pollution by all-consuming single-use plastics.

In the recent past, the United States has drafted a negotiation framework for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Kenya in a bid to deepen trade cooperation with Nairobi. Inasmuch as this deal is touted as controversial due to its reciprocity and asymmetrical form, lobbying by petrochemicals and plastics companies takes Kenya a step behind after having made tremendous progress in containing plastics usage. Considering that the US is a global leader in addressing marine litter, their Kenyan counterpart in the negotiations ought to strike out petrochemicals and plastics from the framework of the negotiations.

The recent pronouncement by the European Union to ban the export of certain plastics waste is a broadminded resolution that signifies environmental consciousness.

This new draft that is effective on July 22, 2020, is guided by the United Nations Basel Convention that regulates and controls transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal.

So this law will subsequently empower countries, especially in Africa with the right to refuse waste shipments of any kind from being dumped.

This law in many senses is cognisant of people's health and environment.

The proponents of single-use plastics have continually made an argument for recycling as a mechanism to curb the pollution menace.

This is unsustainable because only about nine per cent of plastic waste gets recycled, 12 per cent is burnt. The remaining 79 per cent ends up in landfills or the environment. Most African countries like Kenya do not have the requisite infrastructure to recycle plastics.