

#Break Free From Plastic

BEFORE PLASTIC

LIFE

Demonstrating Traditional Practices of Reuse in Africa

Acknowledgements

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GAIA is a global network of grassroots groups, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and individuals, in over 90 countries. The organisation envisions a just, zero waste world built on respect for ecological limits and community rights, where people are free from the burden of toxic pollution, and resources are sustainably conserved, not burned or dumped. GAIA works to catalyse a global shift towards environmental justice by strengthening grassroots social movements that advance solutions to waste and pollution. <u>www.no-burn.org</u>

#Break Free From Plastic

The #BreakFreeFromPlastic (BFFP) Movement is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution. Since its launch in 2016, more than 12,000 organisations and individual supporters from across the world have joined the #BreakFreeFromPlastic movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and to push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. www.breakfreefromplastic.org

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
Overview of the Plastic Problem in Africa	3
Africa's Response to the Plastic Problem	8
A Silver Lining in Addressing Africa's Plastic Problem	13
Chapter 2: Africa's Zero Waste Practices	17
Existing Alternatives to Plastic	19
The Effectiveness of Traditional Alternatives to Plastic	24
The Scalability of Traditional Alternatives to Plastic	27
Chapter 3: Making Reuse and Refill a Stronger Part of Africa's Zero Waste Journey	32
Understanding Reuse and Refill	34
Diverse Reuse & Refill Models in Africa	37
Why Reuse and Refill Systems are Integral in Africa's Water Crisis!	46
Traditional Reuse Systems Still in Use Today in Africa	48
Interview with Hamza Kharti from Morocco on the Famous Markets (Souks) of Morocco	52
Making Reuse & Refill a Pillar of Africa's Zero Waste Journey	56
Chapter 4: Sustaining Current & Traditional Zero Waste Systems into the Future - Recommendations for the Way Forward	64
Conclusion	77
References	78



Executive Summary

Plastic has taken over the world in the past few decades and has burdened Africa's environments and waste management systems. Africa is no stranger to the plastic problem even if it accounts for only 5% of the global plastic production rates and consumes only 4% of global plastics volumes. In this report on Life before Plastic in Africa, we explore the problem on the continent and examine the laws, policies and multilateral agreements put in place to govern waste management and trade. The report showcases examples of traditional practices made of natural materials widely used across the African continent as alternatives to plastic. Further, GAIA and BFFP Africa members provide an insight on existing reuse and refill systems on the continent and examine how reuse and refill can be made a stronger part of Africa's journey towards ending plastic pollution. In conclusion, the Life Before Plastic publication delves into how current and traditional zero waste systems can be sustained in the future by providing and addressing recommendations on corporate accountability, policy makers responsibility and consumer responsibility through making zero waste a lifestyle.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Overview of the Plastic Problem in Africa

Global plastic production has increased more than 20 times since the 1950's and is projected to double by 2034 under business-as-usual scenarios (Plastics crisis: challenges, advances and relationship with waste pickers, 2022). Africa accounts for only 5% of the global plastic production rates and consumes only 4% of global plastics volumes (Sadan and De Kock, 2021), yet it is extremely impacted by plastic pollution. In a study by Babayemi et al (2019) plastic imports between 1990 and 2017, into 33 African countries accounted for more than 117,6 million tons (Mt), consisting of approximately 86.14 Mt of primary plastic polymers and 31.50 Mt of plastic products, respectively. Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa were found to dominate plastic production and importation of plastic polymers and products in the continent. Following closely behind are Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia in increased plastic production, imports, distribution and manufacturing.

Whilst Africa's plastic production and use appear low compared to the rest of the world, the increase in imported manufactured plastic items and packaging into African countries is cause for concern. Numerous global consumer brands are attempting to increase their presence in Africa, implying an impending surge in imports in the absence of significant investment in infrastructure to address the final disposal of these plastic products and packaging (Fuhr and Franklin, 2019). Illegal plastic waste exports in the form of e-waste, mixed municipal waste and textile waste into the continent from higher-income Global North countries further perpetuates the burden of toxic and non-recyclable waste onto already strained resources, economies, infrastructure, worker's rights and the overall health of the environment (Stop Waste Colonialism Public Statement, 2022). Africa accounts for only 5% of the global plastic production rates and consumes only 4% of global plastics volumes, yet it is extremely impacted by plastic pollution.



The impacts and injustices of plastic pollution manifest at each stage of its lifecycle. Upon examining extraction, production, use and disposal of plastic, health and environmental effects occur at every stage of the plastics lifecycle, whether caused by plastic itself or by additives and processing. Up to 99% of plastics are made from fossil fuels i.e oil, gas and coal extracted from oil fields and fracking drill pads belonging to multinational petrochemical companies (Hamilton et al., 2019). Once fossil fuels are extracted, infrastructure, including pipelines, transports raw materials to refineries or directly to the market and can release hundreds of toxins during pumping and piping feedstocks which can cause a wide range of health and environmental effects (Azoulay et al., 2019). For example, in 2015, the plastics sector in South Africa emitted more than 15.8 Mt of carbon dioxide over its lifecycle, which accounted for 3% of the total national greenhouse gas emissions that year. The resin production stage dominated the source of emissions followed by significant contributions from coal based energy in South Africa and informal disposal practices such as the burning of plastic waste (Goga etal., 2023). Exposure to these toxic emissions puts workers' health in factories and nearby communities at risk because they pollute the air, soil and water, impairing the nervous system and causing reproductive and developmental problems, as well as cancer, leukaemia, and genetic impacts like low birth weight (Azoulay et al., 2019).

Waste management systems simply cannot keep up with the amount of plastic produced globally that enters the marketplace (legally and illegally) in Africa. According to UNEP (2018), in 2012, the continent produced an alarming amount of 125 Mt of municipal solid waste (MSW) which is projected to double by the year 2025 and only 4% of MSW is currently recycled. Plastic waste was also found to account for 13% of MSW in Sub-Saharan Africa. This leads to unsightly litter once the items have been consumed, leakage to the environment, a threat to public health (by clogging drainage systems and sewers), as well as a threat to the lives of domestic livestock and wildlife who end up ingesting or getting entangled with the plastic waste items.

Plastic Pollution Lifecycle













Key contributing sources to the generation of plastic waste in Africa include the plastic packaging sector, synthetic textiles, plastic carrier bags, plastic from the fishing sector, disposable plastic medical gear, disposable water sachets, plastic bottles as well as disposable nappies (Sadan and De Kock, 2021).

The highest absolute plastic leakage occurs from the packaging sector in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania (Sadan and De Kock, 2021). Synthetic textiles are another major contributor to the plastic crisis in Africa. Accra's markets in Ghana and rivers in Kenya are flooded with Europe's addiction to fast fashion under the banner of charity to African communities. Despite global plastic waste export regulations, many worn clothes imported to Kenya from Global North countries are synthetic, producing serious environmental and community impacts. In recent years, Kenya has received about 300 million pieces of synthetic, plastic fibre-based apparel, mostly damaged or unsellable, which are generally abandoned, transferred to landfills or burnt and thereby worsening plastic pollution (Trashion: The stealth export of waste plastic clothes to Kenya, 2023).

Ninety percent of the waste generated in Africa is discarded in unregulated dumpsites and landfills, frequently accompanied by the common practice of open burning (UNEP, 2018). This prevailing waste management approach not only gives rise to environmental issues but also poses considerable health risks. Open dumps prevalent in lower-income and marginalised African communities, act as vectors for diseases such as Malaria and cholera (UNEP, 2018; Webster, 2018). The practice of open burning and incomplete incineration is also commonly used to manage excessive plastic waste, which can cause the release of dangerous toxic gases and persistent organic pollutants (POPs) into the atmosphere. It is harmful to human health when inhaled and affects fence line communities in close proximity to these burn sites. In recent air pollution assessments, open burning of mismanaged plastic waste caused the release of 233 kilotonnes of noxious chemical gases in Kenya (IUCN-EA-QUANTIS, 2020). POPs were also found to be present in free-range chicken eggs located close to open burning plastic waste sites in Africa, suggesting severe contamination of food chains (Petrlik et al., 2019).

The impacts of the above practices negatively affect the economic activities in Africa by harming local businesses and communities through deterring tourists from visiting.

7

Africa's Response to the Plastic Problem

In the face of the plastics adversity, Africa stands out as a leader. Several African countries have made tremendous headway in addressing plastic pollution. Africa leads the world with the highest percentage of countries that have enacted plastic bag bans: 37 countries have passed laws regulating plastic bag production and consumption in some way by 2018 (Sadan and De Kock, 2021). Many countries have also implemented waste management policies. Some countries have imposed financial deterrents or economic disincentives in the form of taxes and levies on use and consumption of plastics, especially countries in Southern Africa like Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa (Africa Plastic Policy Map, 2020). Many countries are also parties to or signatories of a number of international and regional policy frameworks to address plastic pollution. However, existing policy frameworks and legislation (as impressive as they may be) are not adequately equipped and resourced to tackle the magnitude of the plastics crisis by taking into account systemic solutions and a full lifecycle approach, they rather overemphasise waste management systems that are further downstream (one of the last stages of the plastics life cycle) or are impeded by lack of enforcement, ineffective implementation and illicit trade.

It is, however, worth mentioning 2 regional frameworks that stand out as progressive in addressing plastic pollution and it's transboundary nature:

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) Timeline



African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN)

The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment brings together African ministers and other key stakeholders every two years or so (either in regular or special sessions) to discuss Africa's positions and participation in global policy processes such as the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and many other related processes within the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the governance body responsible for setting the global environmental agenda, providing overarching policy guidance, and defining policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges. Africa leads the world with the highest percentage of countries that have enacted plastic bag bans: 37 countries have passed laws regulating plastic bag production and consumption in some way by 2018.

It was only until the 17th session of AMCEN in November 2019, in Durban, South Africa, that Ministers of the Environment from Africa committed to various actions to enhance the circular and blue economies and to address plastic pollution as a collective, now known as the Durban Declaration (AMCEN, 2019).

The Durban Declaration marked a significant step in the right direction towards addressing plastic pollution not only on the continent but globally by African leaders adding their collective voice to the voices of the European Union, the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean, and the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment and Climate, **for a new global legally binding instrument on plastic pollution (The Global Plastics Treaty).**

The decisions taken at the AMCEN on plastics have, at large, increased in ambition with each meeting. At the 18th session of the AMCEN in 2021 in preparation for UNEA 5.2, African ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the Durban Declaration to address plastic pollution in the environment, stating: "We will work towards having a new global legally binding agreement on marine litter and plastic pollution that takes a comprehensive approach to address the full lifecycle of plastics, from production and design to waste prevention and management, while ensuring coherence and coordination of activities undertaken by existing regional and international instruments, and create a supporting structure for implementation in developing countries..." (AMCEN, 2021).

In February 2022, at the AMCEN special session still in preparation for UNEA 5.2, it was decided that the African ministers would foster support for the draft resolution on marine litter and plastic pollution, co-drafted by Rwanda and Peru, to guarantee the interests of

African member states and work towards having a new global approach to address plastic pollution as well as develop a common regional approach on the proposed draft resolution. Elements of this draft resolution made suggestions to define the mandate and support the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to begin consultations for a global plastics treaty to be negotiated at UNEA 5.2.

Post UNEA 5.2, the resumed 18th session of the AMCEN took place in September 2022 in Dakar, Senegal (AMCEN, 2022). The session provided an opportunity for the delegates to be briefed on the outcomes of the resumed fifth session of the UNEA 5.2, the status of implementation of the resolutions that were adopted at that session, including the development of the global plastics treaty, with a focus on the organisation of Africa's participation in the intergovernmental negotiating committee as well as critical issues for the continent on plastic pollution. Key decisions that the African Ministers agreed to in this session were integral towards the mandate for a global plastics treaty and included, among other things: 1) Urging member states to upscale measures to address plastic pollution, including microplastics, that address the full life cycle of plastics to achieve sustainable production and consumption of plastics; 2) Encouraging member states to carry out policy reforms that protect human health and the environment by addressing plastics design and elimination or minimisation; 3) Establishing an Africa Group of Negotiators (AGN) on plastic pollution to coordinate Africa's view in the INC process and 4) Prioritising the ban on illegal trafficking and shipment of plastic waste in accordance with the Bamako Convention, into Africa (AMCEN, 2022).

The 19th ordinary session of AMCEN took place in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in August 2023 and brought together delegates from 51 African countries, as well as international partners and stakeholders, to strategise on ways to seize opportunities and enhance cooperation for sustainable development on the continent. One of the major decisions was to strengthen African participation in the development of the global plastics treaty, including in the marine environment, as control and implementation measures become more evident to end plastic pollution (See Chapter 4.1).

The Bamako Convention

The Bamako Convention entered into force in 1998 to prohibit the import of hazardous waste into Africa and is a direct response to Article 11 of the Basel Convention, which encourages parties to enter into bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements on hazardous waste to help achieve the objectives of the convention. It arose from the failure of the Basel Convention to prohibit the trade of hazardous waste to less developed countries and increased reports of developed countries dumping toxic waste into Africa. It was not until 2020 that decision 3/8 was taken to add all forms of plastic waste under its scope, following the similar Basel Convention for its plastic components. This decision also encourages countries who have not already done so to enact bans on plastic bags and single-use plastics and includes the call for the new global plastics treaty following the Bamako Convention. However, only 29 African countries have ratified the Bamako Convention, leaving the ports open to transboundary trade of hazardous waste and plastics, which has repercussions for the health of people and the environment in Africa.



A Silver Lining in Addressing Africa's Plastic Problem

An area that remains as an uncharted bright spot of hope in addressing Africa's plastic pollution crisis is that of Zero Waste Systems, "which is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning, and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health" (Zero Waste International Alliance, 2018). Zero waste replaces the current extractive economy with a more sustainable, cyclical system that focuses on waste prevention and emphasises chains of responsibility, connectivity, and inclusivity within communities. GAIA also recognises that zero waste is not just a proclamation of intent. It is a societal goal with a comprehensive vision, strategies and steps for communities to work towards. Therefore, municipalities adopting a zero waste goal must agree to implement coherent programs and policies that take a holistic approach to embarking on their zero waste journey.



When designing and implementing zero waste plans at local level, municipalities must respect and engage all actors that form the waste ecosystem, including communities, formal and informal workers.

In practical terms, Zero waste has 5 overarching strategies:

- 1. The goal to end waste disposal in dumps, landfills and incinerators
- 2. Industrial responsibility and redesign of products
- 3. Taking consumption patterns within ecological limits
- 4. Developing systems and infrastructure to recover resources at their highest and best use
- 5. Ensuring social and environmental justice, respecting and engaging all sectors that form the resources ecosystem

5 Pillars of Zero Waste





Collectively, these strategies offer a significant opportunity to mitigate Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. In the United States, zero waste approaches have been projected to potentially decrease GHG emissions by more than 400 million metric tons of CO2 annually by 2030 (Platt et al., 2008). To put this into perspective, this is equivalent to removing over 80 coal-fired power plants in the United States from operation.

GAIA and BFFP Africa members from South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal and Zambia have demonstrated that with successful implementation, a zero waste system can truly embrace **traditional knowledge and existing practices** of preservation in Africa that enables the potential for a shift from plastic (See more in Chapter 2). In light of this, it becomes important to document and champion historical, cultural and sustainable solutions that have been tailor-made for the African context, while at the same time leaving room for the integration of new technologies that are environmentally sound and follow best practices.



In this publication, we therefore present Africa's story of zero waste through time and through the lens of members from across the continent while recognising that subtle nuances may exist from socio-economic factors, culture, policy environments, corporate practices and differences in geography. We also examine how reuse and refill can become a stronger part of Africa's zero waste journey and end plastic pollution. Finally, we outline how we anticipate policymakers, corporates and consumers can shift the narrative from single-use plastics towards systems and policies that are designed to achieve zero waste.

Chapter 2

Africa's Zero Waste Practices





Since the invention of plastic in the 1950s, markets around the world have been flooded by plastic, especially single-use plastics slowly seeping in and replacing common tools and items used in everyday life (Fuhr and Franklin, 2019). Plastics have also shaped modern life and changed consumption styles. This is just as much the case on the African continent as everywhere else in the world, where many materials such as plant leaves, wood, clay, iron, bronze, etc., were previously used to make various tools, from food containers to brooms, bags to clothing. This chapter explores traditional alternatives to plastic that are still in use on the African continent, their effectiveness and scalability towards a sustainable future and an end to plastic waste and pollution. It aims to provide an overview of behaviours and practices while recognising that nuances also exist on the continent. The data for this chapter has been gathered through interviews and surveys with GAIA and BFFP Africa members from various African countries.

Existing Alternatives to Plastic

Before the invention of plastics, natural materials were used to make items around the household. This meant that everyday tools were biodegradable, locally-made, reusable and long-lasting, sewing the threads of zero waste across communities. The traditional practices were also a source of income to local artisans. These practices which serve as alternatives to single-use plastic across the continent can be categorised into the following uses: plant leaves, wood and clay, cloth, natural cleaning products and traditional food preservation techniques. In Ethiopia and North African countries, different types of bread, such as Injera, are used both to wrap and hold different foods reducing the need for disposable plates and packaging, and as edible utensils to pick up food, thus reducing plastic utensil consumption.



USE OF PLANT LEAVES

Plant leaves, whether fresh or dry, have long been used and are still used for different purposes. In Uganda, Cameroon, Malawi, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya and Senegal, broad leaves such as banana leaves are often used to wrap and serve food. In places like Morocco, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda, handwoven baskets are made from local materials such as raffia, reed, sisal and dried palm leaves, and serve as sustainable alternatives to plastic bags for carrying and storing various items. In Senegal, leaves are used to assemble kinkeliba tea so that the tea can hold together for sale or storage in the house. Plant leaves are also used to make brooms, hand held fans and other household items such as large mats. In addition to plant leaves, many countries have the tradition of using dried calabash and gourds as serving dishes or containers in which to store or transport liquids and food.

Existing Alternatives to Plastic



USE OF WOOD And Clay

Across the continent, wood is still used to make kitchen utensils and cutlery that have now been replaced by plastic ones around the world. Wood is used to make anything from spoons to bowls, spatulas and mortars. Clay and pottery are also traditions that are very much alive on the continent. Different countries have their own styles and patterns, and clay pots are used for cooking but also storing long shelf life items such as honey, dried herbs or preserved meats.



USE OF CLOTH AND FABRIC

Reusable bags, reusable diapers and reusable menstruation pads made of cloth are a few examples of plastic alternatives still used on the African continent. These can be made from cotton or corn starch and are washable and reusable, reducing the need for disposable single-use items that generate plastic waste. Reusable bags are also used to buy items in bulk at markets and for exchanging goods reducing the need for packaging. In Rwanda, fabric is also embalmed in beeswax to make wrappers.

Packaging free market. © vale_t /iStock



USE OF NATURAL CLEANING PRODUCTS

The use of traditional natural cleaning products is widespread in Africa. Whether it is made by using olive oil in North Africa or coconut oil in West Africa as a base, black soap is used throughout the continent as a cleaning product. It is used for both hygiene and for cleaning natural weaved fabrics. In places like Uganda, people also use vinegar, lemon and baking soda to disinfect surfaces instead of commercial cleaning products packaged in plastic containers.



USE OF TRADITIONAL FOOD PRESERVATION

Traditional methods of food preservation, such as sun-drying and fermenting, help reduce the need for buying these items in single-use plastic food bags and containers. This is illustrated by pickling of certain vegetables, and drying of fruit, vegetables and meats. Some parts of the continent make clarified butter and use cooked animal fat that can be preserved over long periods of time. These traditional practices showcase how regions across Africa have inherently embraced sustainable and well-adapted methods long before the concept of zero waste became widely recognised. These practices not only promote environmental sustainability but also connect communities with their cultural heritage. All of the materials used are easily biodegradable and reusable. They also allow local economies to flourish as the materials are sourced locally, they require local knowledge and keep local crafts and skills alive.

Table 1. Examples of traditional alternatives tosingle-use plastic in different parts of Africa

Material	Countries	Product/use
Banana leaves	Uganda, Malawi, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal	Serve and wrap food
Raffia, reed, sisal, dried palm leaves	Morocco, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Cameroon	House baskets of all sizes, shopping baskets, mats, seats and beds, roofs, umbrellas
Calabash & Gourds	Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Senegal	Liquid and food containers
Dried leaves	Senegal	Kinkeliba tea bags
Cloth & fabric (cotton, corn starch)	Across the continent	Reusable bags, diapers, and menstruation pads
Fabric embalmed in beeswax	Rwanda	Food wrappers
Olive oil / Coconut oil	North Africa / West Africa	Black soap
Vinegar, lemon, baking soda	Uganda	Cleaning products
Sun Drying, fermenting	Across the continent	Preserve vegetables and meats
Wood & Clay	Across the continent	Kitchen utensils, decor and containers



The Effectiveness of Traditional Alternatives to Plastic

As illustrated in the first part of this chapter, there is no shortage of alternatives on the African continent to plastics. Traditional craft is very much alive and preferred in many cases to items made of plastics. Traditional practices are deeply ingrained in the culture of communities, promoting a sense of resource ownership and stewardship (i.e. the practices are not only about nature, but acting for the community by sharing resources, preserving community harmony/access and responsibility for the collective over the individual while ensuring environmental protection). These practices often prioritise waste reduction, resource conservation and harmonious living with nature.

When asked about the effectiveness of these practices in reducing plastic waste and leading towards a zero waste system, some GAIA and BFFP Africa members think that traditional practices that utilise natural materials (such as banana leaves and woven baskets as alternatives to single-use plastics for packaging and carrying items) can significantly reduce plastic waste as they are biodegradable and do not contribute to long-lasting environmental pollution. These practices also promote reusability, steer away from the demand for disposable plastics and lower overall plastic waste generation. Traditional practices often demonstrate adaptability and resilience in using local resources creatively. They should be celebrated, and those which have been superseded with the introduction of plastics can be replaced by practices that are already part of cultural memory; the approach can be used to inspire solutions to modern environmental challenges. Life Before Plastic Demonstrating Traditional Practices of Reuse in Africa

Dorothy Otieno presenting at the GAIA Africa Regional Meeting. ⓒ Rajab Salum

Life was still lived before plastics"

Dorothy Otieno Centre for Environmental Justice and Development (CEJAD), Kenya



However, whilst these practices have their merits, it's important to recognise that they are facing challenges in the age of modernisation, urbanisation and changing consumer preferences. Therefore, a combination of preserving traditional practices and integrating modern sustainable approaches can be a comprehensive strategy to promote effective waste reduction and environmental conservation. In countries like Rwanda, these practices have been supported by strong government policies, public awareness campaigns and a cultural inclination towards environmental conservation. This is not always the case. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Morocco for example, members say that even when governments adopt laws against the use or import of plastic bags, the implementation does not always follow and plastic bags slowly find their way back into markets.

Africa is home to practices and solutions that are effective in reducing the demand for plastics. The alternatives mentioned above existed long before plastics and continue to be used by local populations. They use natural and biodegradable materials, conserve resources, engage the community and have cultural value. They can serve as educational tools to raise awareness about sustainable living. They can be used to teach younger generations about eco-friendly alternatives and the importance of reducing waste.

By incorporating these practices into daily life, people become more conscious of their consumption habits and may make more sustainable choices overall. However, in order for these practices to be truly effective, there needs to be involvement from the public, private and social sectors. Policies and regulations need to be installed and awareness needs to be raised to push towards zero waste models.

The Scalability of Traditional Alternatives to Plastic

While traditional practices in Africa offer valuable insights and strategies for reducing waste and promoting sustainability, they can also serve to complement environmentally sound waste management practices, recycling and innovative product design. By integrating traditional practices with modern solutions, a more comprehensive approach to tackling plastic pollution can be achieved. GAIA and BFFP Africa members believe these practices are highly scalable albeit with some limitations.

These practices have many strengths:

- **Cultural Acceptance:** These practices are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of many communities, making them more likely to be embraced and sustained over time. When traditional practices align with local values and beliefs, they have a higher chance of becoming ingrained in daily routines.
- Low Environmental Impact: Traditional zero waste practices often utilise locally available and biodegradable materials, resulting in a minimal environmental footprint. By reducing reliance on plastics, these practices contribute to a cleaner and healthier ecosystem.
- Resource Conservation: Many traditional practices focus on reusability and minimal waste generation, promoting resource conservation. By utilising materials efficiently and reducing the need for single-use plastics, these practices contribute to a more sustainable use of natural resources.
- Community-Based Solutions: Scaling up traditional practices allows for community involvement and ownership. When communities take the lead in implementing and promoting these practices, it fosters a sense of responsibility towards waste management and environmental preservation.

Doris Makuwira demonstrating what a plastic packaging free lunch looks like. © Aggness Kaunda Traditional practices are often region-specific and adapted to local resources and cultures.
Scaling up these practices can help create locally relevant solutions that empower communities to take ownership of their environmental impact."

Doris Makuwira Go Green save the Environment, Malawi

- Educational and Awareness Opportunities: Promoting traditional zero waste practices opens opportunities for educational and awareness campaigns about the harmful effects of plastic pollution. These campaigns can highlight the benefits of sustainable alternatives and inspire behaviour change among individuals and communities.
- **Consumer Adaptation:** Consumers have shown that they can be adaptable and flexible in their response to sustainable alternatives.

However, there are some obstacles to overcome:

- Modern Lifestyle: As societies modernise and urbanise, traditional practices may become less practical or feasible due to changing habits, convenience and the introduction of new technologies.
- Urban Challenges: Urban areas may pose challenges for some traditional practices, as they may not align with the pace of urban life or the demands of densely populated settings.
- Limited Scope: While traditional practices can contribute to waste reduction, plastic pollution is a complex issue that requires multifaceted solutions, including changes in production, consumption, recycling and waste management.
- Infrastructure and Awareness: Scaling up traditional practices would require infrastructure, education, favourable regulations and awareness campaigns to ensure their effective implementation on a larger scale.
- Plastic-Dependent Industries: Some sectors heavily rely on plastic for packaging, transportation and manufacturing. Transitioning away from plastics in these sectors may require significant changes and innovations.



Traditional practices continue to be used and can be part of a holistic approach to reduce plastic pollution. They are effective and scalable and can be integrated into reuse and recycling systems (i.e. if and only when it displaces new plastic material production that is free from toxics). In order for traditional practices to truly be effective in addressing plastic pollution, an overall reduction of plastic production is needed. This will take a concerted effort from individuals, communities, industries and governments whereby all measures taken in regulating the plastic life cycle must be seen through a just transition lens for all workers with special consideration for waste pickers and communities that will be affected by these transformative changes in the global plastics economy.


These practices are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of many communities, making them more likely to be embraced and sustained over time. When traditional practices align with local values and beliefs, they have a higher chance of becoming ingrained in daily routines."

Edwin Mumbere

Centre for Citizens Conserving Environment & Management (CECIC), Uganda

Chapter 3

Making Reuse and Refill a Stronger Part of Africa's Zero Waste Journey



Reuse is present in our communities and works in households with bottles or other containers that are ultimately used to collect other products."

Raïssa Oureya ONG Jeunes Verts. Togo

Understanding Reuse and Refill

In Africa, there are reuse and refill systems encompassing traditional practices, contemporary methods and emerging technologies (Table 2). Traditional reuse and refill practices are strongly ingrained in many African communities where local vendors frequently return, clean and reuse items such as glass bottles, jugs and containers for use by their customers. Reuse and refill systems are opportune in the move away from the existing linear take-make packaging economy to a Zero Waste Economy. It presents a systems solution that is transformative in nature in contrast to single-use packaging pollution, by reducing virgin material use, retaining packaging in the economy, diverting packaging waste from landfills and incineration and reducing pollution and emissions (Global Plastics Policy Centre, 2023).

There is, however, no single universally applicable reuse and refill model. Instead, different perspectives from both traditional and innovative approaches and socio-economic contexts, define place-based reuse and refill systems. In Africa (and in many parts of the world), the terms 'Reuse'; 'Refill'; 'Repurpose'; 'Repair' are often used interchangeably. There are many reasons why clearly defining these terms are important – as traditional practices can be influential in different ways and transitioning to a reuse system ultimately places accountability on governments and corporations rather than individual behaviour.

According to the Global Plastics Policy Centre, 2023:

Reuse is a comprehensive system for the multiple rotations of reusable packaging which remains within the ownership of the system and is loaned to the consumer. It provides collection, washing and redistribution of containers whereby consumers return the containers back to the system. A key consideration about reusable packaging is the number of times an intentionally reusable item must be reused before its environmental impact per use is less than a comparable single-use item; this number is known as its **sustainability breakeven point** which should be exceeded to prevent a negative environmental impact of the reuse activity. Refill is not included in this definition because there is a heavy reliance on consumers to use their own packaging as part of refill, rather than a systemsupplied packaging. Additionally, reuse is considered to occur only when the reusable packaging is used several times, for the original purpose for which it was conceived (ISO Reuse Standard, 2012).

Refill is the act of replenishing or adding to a container or product, usually by filling it with the same or similar substance it originally contained, often up to its original capacity. It is a strategy that supports the reduction of packaging waste where consumers use their own containers multiple times either through in-store refill systems or at-home concentrate refills.





Whilst it is a promising strategy, given it's affordability and effectiveness in reducing transport volumes (less packaging = lower transport greenhouse gas emissions), it requires careful consideration, for the following reasons:

- Due to the packaging being owned by the consumer, it is not returned to the system to complete a target number of measurable rotations which can create tracking inconsistencies for data collection, monitoring and enforcement. Consequently, this opens doors for manufacturers to report false claims about the reuse capabilities of single-use packaging. However, tracking can be scaled up effectively to prevent consumer reliance and further responsibility.
- Limitations around scalability and standardisation.
- Hygiene, safety and allergen transmission concerns associated with bring your own (BYO) container systems.
- Chemical contamination with containers that are not designed to be reused.

Diverse Reuse & Refill Models in Africa

Several initiatives in Africa are now working to revitalise and scale up reuse and refill systems (Table 2). Local markets and vendors are reintroducing traditional practices alongside newer systems. For example, the rebirth of milk delivery systems that use refillable glass bottles. Furthermore, bulk stores and zero waste shops in cities such as Nairobi and Johannesburg are gaining traction, allowing customers to purchase grains, detergents and personal care items in their own containers.

Reuse and refill innovations are also on the rise. Collaborations are being formed between NGOs , businesses and governments to promote reusable packaging alternatives. In addition, technology-driven projects are developing smartphone applications to enable the tracking and collection of reusable containers, motivating users and encouraging stronger reuse culture that minimises the environmental impact (Table 2).

Africa's experience with traditional, existing and emerging reuse and refill systems demonstrates a dynamic shift towards more sustainable practices. While traditional reuse practices continue to have cultural value, new approaches and innovative solutions are being adopted to address the difficulties created by disposable packaging (Moss et al., 2022).

According to the responses of GAIA and BFFP Africa members, the current reuse and refill systems in their countries are a mix of local and international systems inspired from other parts of the world (predominantly from Global North countries).

Members presented a variety of models in their responses (Table 2) which is also supported by research into the categories of systems that are developing in parts of Africa:

Examples of Different Reuse and Refill Systems Present in Different Parts of Africa





Table 2.

Examples of different reuse and refill systems present in different parts of Africa

CONSUMER-OWNED CONTAINER

Sub-Category	Product	Country where system is present	Reason why the system works/ is important
Refill & Vending Dispensing Stations	Water, Milk, Juice, Palm Oil, Food/ Snacks and Beverages, Home and Personal Care	Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Tanzania	Reduces reliance on multi- layered, non-recyclable packaging, single-use bottles, food containers, water sachets while providing access to safe and clean drinking water
Zero Waste Shops/ Packaging- Free Markets	Food, Snacks, Home and Personal care	South Africa, Malawi, Rwanda, Morocco, Senegal	Reduces single-use packaging and encourages the use of reusable containers
Zero Waste Restaurants Discount System for Take-Away	Food	Senegal	Reduces single-use take- away packaging and containers

CONCENTRATE-BASED REFILL SYSTEMS

Sub-Category	Product	Country where system is present	Reason why the system works/ is important
At-home Reconstituted Product	Personal Care, Detergents, Perfume and Cosmetics	South Africa	Reduces transport volume and weight (less packaging = lower transport greenhouse gas emissions)

PRE-FILLED REFILL SYSTEMS				
Sub-Category	Product	Country where system is present	Reason why the system works/ is important	
Deposit Refund Scheme	Beverages	Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal	Reduces reliance on single-use bottles	

DIGITAL APPLICATIONS AND REWARDS

Sub-Category	Product	Country where system is present	Reason why the system works/ is important
Reusable Bag Rewards and Discounts	General Use	South Africa	Promotes awareness and opportunities that encourages reuse and refill behaviour

REUSE

Sub-Category	Product	Country where system is present	Reason why the system works/ is important
Repurposing	Glass soda bottles used for kerosene, oil, selling peanuts and snacks; Segregated plastic waste used to manufacture shoes, bags, packaging soap, home gardening containers; Reuse of old newspaper for selling snacks; Reuse of plastic bottles for local/home-made juices (bissap, bouye, ginger, ditakh, etc.)	Tanzania, Ghana, Togo, Senegal	Reduces single-use packaging

REUSE

Sub-Category	Product	Country where system is present	Reason why the system works/ is important
Storage	Local (Moi-Moi) or Traditional Food stored in Aluminium cans, hollowed out calabash	Nigeria	Reduces the need for single-use plastic storage containers
Reusable Cloth Diapers	Baby care	Rwanda	Reduces single-use, disposable diapers
Reusable Bags	Shopping and General Use	Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and wide-spread across Africa	Reduces the need for single-use plastic bags
Reusable Cup and Container Deposit Fee Programs	Beverages and Take-away	South Africa	Reduces single-use packaging
Reusable Shipping and Logistics	Back to Business (B2B) Reusable Transport uses pallet, pallet wrap, crates and totes. Back to Consumer (B2C) Reusable Shipping services replaces single-use plastic packaging with cardboard boxes or reusable packaging.	South Africa	Reduces single-use packaging associated with logistics, transport and shipping delivery services
Reusable Coffee Capsules	Beverages	Senegal	Reduces single-use coffee capsules
Reusable typha straw	Beverages	Senegal	Reduces single- use straws by using invasive plant growing in the country





Milk dispensing ATM in Kenya. © CEJAD

Ana Rocha demonstrating reuse and refill. © Merrisa Naidoo We still have refillable bottles being used for soda and beer as well."

Ana Rocha GAIA and Nipe Fagio, Tanzania Life Before Plastic Demonstrating Traditional Practices of Reuse in Africa

Farima Tidjani enjoying coconut water using a Typha straw. ${f \odot}$ adansonia.green

Typha is an invasive reed in Senegal that is spreading more and more because of dams. PailTyfa has had the good idea of offering reusable and compostable straws made from 100% natural typha reeds. They have a shelf life of 1 year, but can be extended by storing them in the refrigerator."

Farima Tidjani GAIA and adansonia.green



Why Reuse and Refill Systems are Integral in Africa's Water Crisis!



Reuse and refill systems are integral to addressing Africa's crisis of access to clean drinking water. For far too long, Fast Moving Consumer Goods Companies (FMCGs), like Coca-Cola and Nestle have been packaging water in minuscule societal menaces called sachets and single-use bottles, selling the narrative of clean drinking water whilst polluting African communities. Between 2018-2022, Brand-Audits in Africa found 93,262 water sachets in 14 African countries, with Coca-Cola being the top water sachet polluter from 2020-2022 (Branded: Five years of holding corporate plastic polluters accountable, 2022). Ironically, companies choosing to sell drinking water in sachets undermine the basic human right to safe and clean drinking water and exploit this need for their own financial gain. In reality, sachets' true costs are externalised, as communities suffer the consequences from this unrecyclable, low-value waste choking waterways, burdening waste management systems and their workers, disrupting coastal communities' livelihoods, creating health risks and contaminating food systems. Privatisation of water sources has also contributed to the plastic pollution crisis from bottled water in Africa. Nestle has been found hoarding water from around the world to bottle and sell for a huge profit- in Pakistan, Nigeria and even in the United States, with communities that live the closest to their water plants suffering the most (Hakim, 2018). Far worse is that these same companies package products in recyclable materials and pay a levy to support the collection of their generated waste in the Global North, while selling the same products in unrecyclable sachets in the Global South, burdening the local waste management systems without any financial contribution (Liamzon et al., 2020).

This could all be avoided by making drinking water available through water stations and refill systems, and investing in alternative product delivery systems to ensure accountability – including costs needed to live outside of communities, and can be informed by traditional practices for greater success in Africa. Access to clean drinking water is an universal human right, and water sources in a country should serve the country's population and not be enablers of private sector profit combined with plastic pollution.

Traditional Reuse Systems Still in Use Today in Africa

GAIA and BFFP Africa members also provided interesting responses on traditional reuse and zero waste practices that are still in use to this day. Traditional practices stem from cultural beliefs and lifestyles regarding zero waste. They are either a continuation of what was done by Africa's ancestors or have come up based on cultural beliefs of zero waste and wanting to live in a way that preserves resources in Africa. It is important to highlight the aspects that make Africa different from the rest of the world and share best practices around the world with, of course, local adaptation.







Members also explained that traditional craftsmanship in Africa has always been a basis for avoiding single-use plastic and producing durable, reusable and refillable containers. Whether sisal, raffia or banana leaf baskets/packaging material, calabashes or fired clay pots, traditional practices have been used in African people's daily lives with the aim of being reusable. These products are still used for a variety of purposes, such as shopping, storing and dispensing water and other liquids. What's more, is that they can even create a social gathering place, for example the whole family from grandparents to grandchildren, gather after a meal and chats around the central terracotta water jar (récipient) in village homes. This further demonstrates the connection between the importance of environmental protection/ stewardship and strong communities.

People also still go to the local market often in African countries. Supermarkets are fairly new, and many people are not yet used to them. Moreover, shopping is generally done daily for fruits, vegetables and fish due to low purchasing power, daily expenses and lack of storage infrastructure. A large proportion of the population earns only a small salary at the end of each working day, and therefore lives from day to day. This habit of shopping at local markets is a very good opportunity for zero waste and reuse and refill systems to ensure access to fresh locally-produced food. Most products on the market have been produced in a nearby area and don't need individual packaging to be distributed. Customers can bring their own container or box and fill it with the items they want to buy, and businesses and local authorities can be confident that customers are regular and able to return packaging if supplied.



Many supermarkets, some of which are Global North chains like Carrefour (Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia, Kenya, Egypt and Uganda), Super U (Mauritius), Auchan (Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire) and local stores are now starting to reproduce the market's way of selling and now sell local produce in bulk in the same way as at the local markets. In Senegal for example, the plastic use laws and fines have resulted in Carrefour and Auchan aiming to eliminate the sale of plastic bags and offering paper and textile alternatives (Pujol-Mazzini, 2019). They even use it as a marketing tool. Some products are also sold in-store, but more along the lines of the Global North, with dispensers for cleaning products, personal care products, dry foods and sweets.

People in Africa are also accustomed to purchasing small quantities of food from local stores that buy in bulk and resell in small portions. Following this practice, some countries have set up refill systems - eg, milk and beverage vending machines that can dispense fresh milk, fruit juices, other drinks or even cooking oil into customers' bottles or containers. Another example from Africa is the creative adaptation of a container's usage for longevity. This repurpose system is guite informal, and many bottles are used to store and sell palm oil, palm wine, made in a non-industrialised production system as well as kerosene bought in barrels and separated into small portions for distribution. Vendors also tend to reuse glass bottles to sell peanuts, plastic bottles for homemade fruit juices vendors, and out-of-date newspapers to sell snacks on the street. The same trend is observed in households, where containers collected from different origins and from different kinds of food are used several times for other food, cosmetics or different purposes, before being thrown away. Large plastic bottles are also used as parking reservations (after having been filled with a coloured liquid for decoration purposes) and flowerpots. The influence of traditional practices and cultures are clearly demonstrated in these expressions of reuse, refill and repurpose.

Drawing on the diversity of the models presented, this chapter extracts unifying themes and lessons that can guide Africa on the road to zero waste. Local practices and creative adaptations will emphasise a sense of community and resourcefulness.











Interview with Hamza Kharti from Morocco on the Famous Markets (Souks) of Morocco

What are the different kinds of traditional markets found in Morocco?

Morocco features a variety of traditional markets, each specialising in different products. These include food markets, antique and flea markets, fish and meat markets, etc...

For sellers who sell fruits and vegetables, where do they buy their produce from?

They usually source their produce from local farms, neighbouring rural regions, and specialised wholesale markets within or near the city.

Compared with a conventional supermarket, what are the differences in how goods are packaged?

Goods are often sold in bulk, reducing the need for excessive plastic wrapping.

Are the goods sold at these markets cheaper than regular supermarkets?

Yes, goods sold at traditional markets are more affordable than regular supermarkets.

What are some of the zero waste practices at these markets?

Practices include the The use of reusable containers, cloth bags, baskets, leaves and paper. Additionally, organic waste from food products is often repurposed as animal feed.

Do these markets take place outdoors?

Yes, the majority of traditional markets in Morocco take place outdoors.

Do sellers have temporary shelters? If so, from what kinds of materials are these shelters made from?

Sellers do have temporary shelters. Often makeshift, these shelters are created using cloth, plastic sheets, wooden frames and cordage.

Do you know how many people are employed by Morocco's traditional markets?

While I don't have exact figures, many people are employed in Morocco's traditional markets. This includes traders, vendors, artisans, labourers, and various support roles.

Are these individuals considered informal workers in Morocco? Yes.

Do you know how much revenue is generated within this sector - that contributes to the country's annual GDP?

Unfortunately, I don't have specific data on the revenue generated by these markets and their contribution to the annual GDP.

Do waste pickers and waste workers work within these market spaces?

Yes, waste pickers and workers often operate within and around these market spaces.

Who visits these markets? Is there a particular target demographic i.e. tourists?

Locals and people from nearby who shop for daily necessities and tourists who seek an authentic experience.

Life Before Plastic Demonstrating Traditional Practices of Reuse in Africa

W.S.

Morocco has a rich tradition of markets (souks), absolutely not zero waste but these markets often involve less packaging compared to modern supermarkets and the customers can bring their own containers."

Hamza Kharti Morocco

lorocco markets. © Hamza Kharti

Making Reuse & Refill a Pillar of Africa's Zero Waste Journey

GAIA and BFFP members have proposed a multitude of ways to strengthen reuse and refill systems in Africa, integrating them into the fabric of Africa's zero waste aspirations. These include:

Culture and Community

Cultural resonance: Reuse has been a strong part of African community and culture towards minimising waste and encouraging pride and ownership of sustainable practices. Traditional reuse and refill is still practised today. This knowledge is still held by older generations, and it is possible to harness this expertise to relearn what once existed and adapt it to current realities. It can create a strong foundation for implementing reuse and refill models on the continent.

Sense of Community: Africa's strong sense of community and shared responsibility is a lever for promoting collective initiatives such as bulk purchasing and resource sharing.



Policy

Political will and support is vital for Africa to make reuse and refill a stronger part of its zero waste journey. Governments play a crucial role in developing an enabling environment through supportive policy frameworks and regulations that encourage the adoption of reuse and refill models. The global plastics treaty presents the strongest opportunity to lay the foundations and framework for reuse systems to evolve into a key tool to tackle plastic pollution. The following policy provisions (Reuse Headlines for BFFP Policy Shop and BFFP Movement, 2023) can be put forward within the treaty to drive coherent and standardised international reuse systems action:

- Priority must be given to reduction and reuse systems over recycling, bio-based, biodegradable or compostable plastics, and non plastic alternatives.
- Reuse must be promoted in a materialagnostic manner - material choice is a design decision to be made for the best environmental outcome for a specific application in a specific circumstance (no one-size-fits-all best material - and certainly not plastics).
- There must be consideration of targets and baselines for reuse across sectors, with an initial focus on high impact categories where reuse systems already exist, such as packaging, and discussion of how to align plastic reduction targets with reuse increase targets as part of the obligations in the agreement. In order to incentivise and maximise the efficiency of the reuse systems, the targets should include effective and accessible takeback systems for reusable products that are shared when possible, which will help both to cut CO2 emissions and reduce waste by ensuring high return rates.
- Unambiguous and enforceable priority definitions for reuse, refill and repair, reuse system/s that apply to products and systems, not materials must be included.



- Minimum design and performance criteria can be included for reuse systems that provide toxic-free, reusable products which support healthy communities and just levels for planetary boundaries, processes (e.g, collection and washing), and mechanisms and infrastructure needed for effective and safe (including toxic-free) reuse systems that ensure a number of rotations past the sustainability break-even point. This should include certification and labelling. Safe as defined by UNEP (2021), is understood as supporting biodiverse, toxic - and hazard-free environments and healthy human communities.
- All reuse systems must enable a just transition, recognising rights, knowledge and expertise of Indigenous Peoples, traditional knowledge holders, waste pickers and other informal waste workers, vulnerable and marginalised communities and environmental justice communities.
- Reuse systems must identify essential elements for national implementation within national action plans of effective reuse systems and related capacity building, finance and technology transfer requirements.

Governments also need to compel polluters to invest in reuse and alternative product delivery systems that avoid the production of plastic in the first place and redirect the costs of reuse systems onto them (i.e. polluter pays). This is one of the key systemic changes required to prevent the full consequences of climate change and plastic pollution.

Investment and Innovation

Entrepreneurship: Investment opportunities are key for the development of reuse and refill projects, particularly among young entrepreneurs as a means of developing the African continent and creating jobs.

Innovation: Environmentally sound and innovative technology can be applied to product design, packaging and distribution to align with reuse and refill models whilst discrediting false techno fixes. Technology integration can also promote efficient digital container tracking, mobile payment systems, data analytics cleaning and management to ensure hygiene and quality standards are met.

THE 93FILLERY

Incentives: Discounts or rewards for using refillable containers and reusable practices can be introduced to motivate consumer participation and behaviour change.

The Refillery zero waste shop in Johannesburg, South Africa. © GAIA

Economic benefits: Implementing reuse and refill systems can offer economic benefits such as reduced production costs and create alternative job streams and revenue pathways such as new local business opportunities and must be recognised as such. Adequate infrastructure: Each phase of reuse and refill systems (i.e. collection, washing and redistribution) can only be implemented through sound investment in infrastructure.

Investment in research and development: Standardised, compatible, and globally accepted reuse products and systems can be fostered through robust research and development.

Resource Conservation

Resource Conservation: Recognise that reuse and refill models align with the principles of resource conservation in Africa, which is essential for regions with limited resources and growing populations. Adopting these models can lead to more efficient resource utilisation by reducing the demand for raw materials, energy and water used in producing new products and packaging.

Local Resources: Africa is abundant in natural materials like bamboo, palm leaves and jute, which can be used to create reusable products and packaging. Utilising these materials can reduce the reliance on single-use plastic, but should not be depleted for single-use alternatives to plastics.





Awareness Raising and Behaviour Changes

Environmental Awareness through educational campaigns: Consumer awareness and buy-in is integral for the adoption and scaling-up of reuse and refill systems. Consumer demand for alternative and sustainable delivery systems will increase, which in turn will push companies to adopt reuse and refill models.

Capacity-building: Businesses and entrepreneurs with the expertise need to be equipped and skilled to effectively implement and manage reuse and refill systems.

Collaboration and Partnerships:

Collaboration among governments, businesses, NGOs, local communities and environmentally conscious youth groups, is essential for scaling up reuse and refill initiatives. Partnerships can leverage resources, knowledge exchange, expertise and collective action to drive impactful change.

Demystification: The benefits associated with plastic packaging such as assumed hygiene and cleanliness benefits need to be debunked.







This journey is the beginning of the many benefits that flow from strengthening reuse and refill systems, including cultural alignment, job creation, waste reduction, resource conservation, economic opportunities, and cost savings for households. By harnessing these opportunities and addressing the challenges, Africa can make significant progress in integrating reuse and refill into its zero waste journey. This transition will require a collective effort from all stakeholders, emphasising the importance of sustainability, resource preservation and the well-being of future generations. As the continent adapts to the changing global landscape, embracing reuse and refill practices will undoubtedly contribute to a

greener, cleaner and more sustainable Africa. Community leadership with government and corporate accountability is the only way to ensure reuse systems can be enabled whereby traditional practices and values inform reuse systems holistically, not just the products used.

Africa can pave - and - lead - a sustainable path to a zero waste future, where reuse and refill systems represent "a vital opportunity to move away from the existing linear take-make-waste packaging economy " and are tailor-made to suit local contexts for successful adoption and longterm impact (Global Plastics Policy Centre, 2023) and play a central role in eliminating single-use plastic pollution.



Overall, a strong commitment from governments, businesses, communities, and individuals is essential to making reuse and refill a significant part of Africa's zero waste journey. By embracing these practices, Africa can not only address its waste challenges but also promote sustainable development, create jobs, and contribute to a healthier environment for its people."

Eskedar Awgichew Eco-Justice Ethiopia



Chapter 4

Sustaining Current & Traditional Zero & Traditional Zero & Waste Systems & Into the Future & Recommendations for the Way Forward

them see

In Chapter 2 and 3, we explored the traditional knowledge and existing practices of preservation and zero waste systems in Africa that enable the potential for a shift away from plastic through the lens of active GAIA and BFFP Africa member organisations eager to embrace holistic solutions that align with both cultural traditions and modern sustainability principles.



In this chapter, we carve the way forward with recommendations from GAIA and BFFP Africa members in preserving the longevity of those solutions well into the future.

Based on the responses of GAIA and BFFP Africa members, there is definitely a renewed interest in sustainable practices that came before a life that was packaged in plastic, one that encompasses traditional practices, contemporary methods and emerging environmentally sound technologies. It is about a future incepted on real solutions that demonstrates the power to reduce overall plastic production through alternative delivery systems, zero waste communities and reuse and refill initiatives that respects our planetary boundaries (Branded: Five years of holding corporate plastic polluters accountable, 2022). However, it is going to take collective efforts from corporations demonstrating accountability, policy-makers implementing legally-binding policies and consumers recognising their power and right to a safe, clean and healthy environment that is toxic-free.

The following recommendations are seen as a holistic means to sustain current and traditional zero waste systems well into the future:
1

Increasing robust policy to address plastic production and its impacts

The Global Plastics Treaty represents the strongest opportunity to address the root cause of the plastic pollution crisis and lead to any significant impact on plastic production reduction and the extraction of fossil fuels. The plastics treaty is an acknowledgement by governments that plastic pollution knows no borders and therefore global coordinated action is needed - and given the failure of several voluntary initiatives and the severity of the plastic pollution crisis, the time could not be more ripe for a treaty. It is the result of strong pressure that has been building globally for action on plastics for several years. At the international level, this has been part of ongoing discussions at UNEA. History was made at UNEA 5 in 2022 where the plastic pollution narrative transitioned from being restricted to a marine litter only problem to one that needs to be addressed across its full lifecycle and as part of the UNEA 5/14 Resolution, the mandate for the world's first plastics treaty was passed. UNEP requested the executive director to convene an INC to begin its work during the second half of 2022, with the ambition of

completing that work by the end of 2024 for the plastics treaty.

This global avenue could unlock systemic change away from plastics at pace and scale and propel the entire petrochemical, plastic and FMCGs (Fast Moving Consumer Goods Companies) industry to shift towards reuse and environmentally sound design.

Within the process, the following recommendations are deemed high in priority to Africa members for a strong plastics treaty (Communicating African CSOs Messages Towards a Globally Binding Plastics Treaty, 2023):

 Global plastic production reduction starting with the measures that can deliver a phasedown of plastic production to sustainable levels compatible with human health, human rights and the environment through the development of global, legally binding, production freeze and phasedown targets by a specific point in time.



- Identifying and regulating toxic and hazardous chemicals and monomers/ oligomers/polymers of concern.
- Guaranteeing the inclusion, integration, just transition and accessibility of waste pickers and frontline communities into national waste management policies and the Global Plastics Treaty process.
- Harmonising standards and guidelines for environmentally sound plastic waste management.

- Ending of waste colonialism and dumping on the African continent.
- Strengthening Standards and Guidelines for EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) that is mandatory, integrates waste pickers and other waste workers and respects the waste hierarchy by prioritising reuse over recycling.
- Robust Financial Mechanism to Support the Effective Implementation of the Treaty.

- Supporting the Institution of a Dedicated Global Scientific body for the treaty.
- Prohibiting dangerous practices such as open burning, incineration, firing in coal-fired power plants and other wasteto-energy processes, co-processing in cement kilns, and chemical recycling to protect human health and the environment.

This instrument is particularly important for the African continent, given that enforcement of the many plastic bans in Africa has been variable and challenged by regulatory gaps, weak institutional power, thriving black markets, lack of standardised measures and intensive lobbying by the plastics industry.





Demanding Concrete Actions and Genuine Commitments from Corporations

Fast-moving consumer goods companies (FMCGs) such as Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Nestle and Mondelez International are among the top plastic polluters that produce millions of tons of single-use plastic packaging annually (Branded: Five years of holding corporate plastic polluters accountable, 2022). These companies have attested to: years of corporate failures, inactions and distractions which include voluntary commitments that amount to little to nothing and lack real accountability, overemphasis on recycling capabilities and capacities, pursuit of a range of 'false solutions' that are often misguided distractions in an effort to hoodwink the public or are harmful to the environment and human health (i.e., plastic credits, waste-to-energy, unproven technologies such as chemical recycling and burning plastic in cement kilns). Such strategies are an attempt to blindside from the real cause of the plastic pollution crisis and continue to perpetuate plastic production.

Corporate double standards also play out first-hand within African communities

whereby they introduce non-recyclable products into the African market and overburden the local waste management systems without any financial contribution, whilst packaging the same products in recyclable materials and paying a levy to support the collection of their generated waste in the Global North. Their underhanded acts are not alone in the capitalist playing field. These FMCGs and others are customers of the world's largest plastic resin producers like ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron Phillips, Ineos, and Dow - vertically integrated fossil fuel/petrochemical companies that make petrochemicals from their oil and gas operations.

The interests of the corporations have time and time again placed the lives, livelihoods and resources of the African continent and the Global South at the forefront of social and environmental injustice. It is time this level of inertia transitioned into concrete actions and clear pathways toward meaningful reductions in plastic production that are supported by actual mechanisms for remediation. Recommendations that demand genuine accountability from corporations need to include:

- Re-thinking product design and packaging in a way that:
 - Integrates traditional and local craftsmanship through place-based research that ensures where traditional practices are adopted; these practices serve as standalone solutions but also align with modern systems while maintaining functionality, traditional techniques and preservation of cultural heritage (which can add uniqueness and cultural value to products while promoting sustainable alternatives that resonates with consumers and supports local economies)
 - Replaces single-use with reuse and refill delivery systems
 - Utilises locally available renewable sourced materials for a low one-time cost that fosters collaboration with local communities and artisans
 - Incorporates durability and longevity into design models
 - Embraces minimalism through packaging-free products

- Attracts like-minded partnerships and investments
- Is compatible and exchangeable
- Requires harmonised and accurate labelling that is not misleading and maintains full product disclosure and transparency
- Investing in education and awareness programmes and campaigns that encourage consumer buy-in, in adopting Zero waste practices and making sustainable product alternative choices.
- Recognising that plastic pollution is a crisis caused by plastic production and must be addressed by capping production.



3

Informed and Empowered Consumers

For decades, the public has been conditioned to believe that the problem of plastic pollution was caused by their own undisciplined ways and the failure of governments to institute and implement proper waste management systems. However, it is mainly due to corporations saturating our societies with single-use plastics of all kinds with no consideration of how they can be managed in an environmentally safe and benign manner (Branded, 2022). The power of mounting public pressure that instigates change does however, lie with consumers. Data from a Deutsche investigation (Schacht, 2022) "shows that companies only change their tactics when pressured through legislation, public accountability and consumer demand." This section, therefore, talks about transforming lifestyle goals to embrace African pride, without it being a barrier to community aspirations or diverting the responsibility away from corporations for their plastic pollution.

Consumers are recommended to take the following actions by:

- Adopting zero waste as part of their lifestyle through reuse/refill, sorting of waste and opting for sustainable alternatives
- Repurposing/repairing items creatively to extend their lifespan
- Embracing minimalism
- Reducing food waste by planning meals, buying only what is needed and properly storing food
- Composting food scraps to divert waste from landfills
- Holding brands and policymakers accountable by demanding policies that promote zero waste practices, transparency about chemicals in plastics and provisions of real alternatives.
- Setting personal sustainability goals



- Making thoughtful and conscious purchasing decisions by prioritising buying items that are durable, have minimal packaging and fulfil genuine needs.
- Donating to charity or participating in clothing swaps and community exchange events instead of throwing away usable items.
- Supporting truly sustainable brands and zero waste/bulk food stores.
- Disposing of hazardous waste (batteries, electronics, etc.) at designated collection points responsibly.
- Demonstrating commitment to zero waste as a way to encourage and inspire peers and communities.



Multinationals and political decision-makers can show more responsibility when it comes to enabling the sustainability and possibility of the zero waste model by popularising laws on the use, trade and management of plastic waste at local, national and international level, because the laws exist but they are not being made well known by the population."

Nyebone Faustin

Appui aux Initiatives Communautaire de Protection de l'Environnement et de Développement Durable (AICED), République Démocratique du Congo



Consumers determine what is produced and promoted therefore, if consumers are more vocal about their desires for more reuse and refill products the producers and policy makers will comply with their demands. Also refusing single use systems and giving quality feedback to producers on the products and systems available in the market will go a long way to encourage more zero waste systems and limit the circulation of single use products. As well as adopting positive zero waste lifestyle changes. This also requires a lot of awareness creation, capacity building and education for citizens to see the alternative and benefits of a reuse and refill systems"

Benson Dotun Fasanya Centre for Earth Works (CFEW), Nigeria

2

Packaging free markets © mustafa6nox/iStock

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Conclusion

Life was lived before in Africa before becoming packaged in plastic. This report has demonstrated that Africa can pave - and - lead - a sustainable path to a zero waste future, where reuse and refill systems represent "a vital opportunity to move away from the existing linear take-make-waste packaging economy " and are tailor-made to suit local contexts for successful adoption, long-term impact and play a central role in eliminating single-use plastic pollution. Traditional and contemporary practices are still very much alive on the continent and deeply ingrained in the culture of communities, promoting a sense of resource ownership and stewardship that places resource preservation at the heart of Africa's zero waste aspirations. However, in order for traditional practices to be meaningfully integrated into the suite of solutions that address plastic pollution, an overall reduction of plastic production is needed to deliver a phasedown of plastic production to sustainable levels compatible with human health and human rights that respect the planetary boundaries. This will demand that all actors within the global plastics economy demonstrate accountability. Plastic-polluting corporations must reduce the amount of plastic they produce. Policymakers and governments must negotiate in good faith for a strong, robust Global Plastics Treaty and hold corporations accountable to their commitments. Consumers must recognise their power and right to a safe, clean and healthy environment and demand policies and practices that promote zero waste. Finally, it is important to recognise the aspects that make Africa unique from the rest of the world and share best practices that can be harmonised for local adaptation in any context globally.

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78

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