

THE EAST AFRICAN SUSWATCH E-BULLETIN

A *Monthly* from the East African Sustainability Watch Network and INFORSE East Africa

Civil Society Call for Local Sustainable and Climate Solutions in Nebbi District



Location of
Nebbi district in
West Nile region

The seventh Uganda Water and Environment Week (UWEWK2024) organised by the Ministry of Water and Environment and Partners, took place from March 18 to 22, 2023 on the overall theme: “*Rethinking collective action and innovative solutions to water, environment, and climate change crisis in Uganda*”. On the occasion of this event, Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP) and Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD) issued a joint civil society statement that highlights issues and proposals grounded in their experiences while implementing the on-going *Climate Action for Improved and Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISL) Project* in Nebbi District (West Nile part of Uganda).



Based on the cumulative responses from community representatives in the course of implementing the different CAISAL project activities, JEEP and UCSD collated and raised a number of issues for Nebbi district on the occasion of the UWEWK2024. These include the growing shortage of firewood due to overcutting of trees / deforestation, complicated by the Presidential ban on charcoal burning and charcoal business in northern and north eastern Uganda since last year. As a result, the price of charcoal and firewood has gone up affecting women who have to look for fuel to cook every day, and for use in their businesses.

The Joint statement also noted that, ‘rampant bush burning / wildfires for hunting bush rats and clearance of farm lands ahead of planting (dry season) and the need for rejuvenation of pastures has reportedly led to loss of crops, trees, property, wildlife and in some cases human lives’. Other issues raised include wetland encroachment and degradation due to increased demand for farmland, brickmaking and sand mining and poor waste management especially the single use plastic bags and used plastic bottles in many of the trading centres in Nebbi district, that clog drainage channels and farmlands, among other negative effects

The Joint statement flags out the impact of climate change as evidenced by the prolonged droughts leading to shortage of pastures and scarcity of water in Erussi, Ndhew and Jupangira. This has impacted on women and girls who have to shoulder the burden of looking for water for home use. Indeed, according to the Water office in Nebbi district, ‘drying of springs in Erussi, Ndhew and Jupangira has negatively affected access to water, while pollution of ground water by pit latrines in Parambo, Kucwiny and Erussi is a public health concern’. In addition, flooding is now common during the rainy seasons, which have been amplified by the overcutting of trees and removal of vegetation in natural settings.

The Joint statement calls on Development Partners to support communities to adopt local sustainable and climate solutions that JEEP and UCSD are promoting under the CAISAL project, even when it ends in 2024. ‘These should be buttressed by entrepreneurial skills for women and youths, making use of other programmes and projects that promote climate - smart farming practices (to replace unsustainable practices), and appropriate technology for value-addition with energy efficiency and alternatives to biomass energy’, the Joint statement emphasised.

The Joint statement also calls on Parliament of Uganda, NEMA Uganda and other authorities to take a more nuanced national level action on single use plastics and used plastic bottles in order to back up community clean up exercises conducted in Nebbi and elsewhere in Uganda. Currently plastics make up a significant fraction of what is collected. Though this is partly reused in the community, a significant amount is burnt in the ‘open’ as the only ‘viable’ option.

The CAISAL project (July 2023 – December 2024) is working towards promotion of sustainable local energy solutions and improved livelihoods for poor rural communities in Nebbi district with funding from Civil Society in Development (CISU) and Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy (NFRE) - Denmark. [Read the full Joint Civil Society Statement on Issues and Proposals for Nebbi District as Part of the UWWEK2024 from here:](https://www.scribd.com/document/714859341/Joint-Civil-Society-Statement-on-Issues-and-Proposals-for-Nebbi-District-as-Part-of-the-UWWEK2024) <https://www.scribd.com/document/714859341/Joint-Civil-Society-Statement-on-Issues-and-Proposals-for-Nebbi-District-as-Part-of-the-Uganda-Water-and-Environment-Week-2024-UWEWK2024>

‘Address Food Waste at Both Individual and Universal Levels’ – Global Food Waste Index Report



Last year, on the occasion of the International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste Reduction on the theme: “Reducing Food Loss and Waste: Taking Action to Transform Food Systems”, the East African Community (EAC), in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) highlighted the challenge of post-harvest losses that occur throughout the fruits and vegetable value chain, an important subsector that averagely contributes between 20% and 30% of the region’s agricultural Gross Domestic Product on average. It was noted that at times, post-harvest losses reach 35% to 60%, making it difficult for the East African region to optimally reap the opportunities in the sector in terms of poverty reduction, improvement of livelihood through sustainable food security, increased confidence of farmers, economic development and environmental sustainability.

Ahead of the International Day of Zero Waste (March 30) that highlights both the importance of bolstering waste management globally and the need to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and WRAP – a global NGO based in the UK, released the *UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024*. The Report provides the most accurate global estimate on food waste at retail and consumer levels. It provides guidance for countries on improving data collection and suggests best practices in moving from measuring to reducing food waste.

According to the UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024, food waste is not just a ‘rich country’ problem, with levels of household food waste differing in observed average levels for high-income, upper-middle, and lower-middle-income countries by just 7 kg per capita. At the same time, hotter countries (like in East Africa) appear to generate more food waste per capita in households, potentially due to higher consumption of fresh foods with substantial inedible parts and a lack of robust cold chains.

The *East African Community Post-Harvest Loss Management Strategy and Action Plan for the Fruits and Vegetables Value Chain, 2020-2030* highlights factors that lead to post-harvest losses. These include lack of local availability of post-harvest tools, limited technical know-how in handling practices that can reduce losses, poor transportation systems including rural roads, poor market infrastructure and inadequate investment in substantive programs to monitor and systematically evaluate losses at the pre-harvest stage by EAC Partner States.

In Uganda, food losses and wastages arise mainly due to poor post-harvest handling practices and through the absence of adequate and appropriate food infrastructure in harvest and post-harvest systems, for example, during the preparation stages (poor drying leading to high moisture content), storage, transportation and processing. This is exacerbated by poor food storage infrastructure and cold transportation facilities (Economic Policy Research Centre, 2022). As a result, an estimated loss of 72 billion Uganda shillings is lost every season due to limited investment in addressing food waste and losses, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (Slow Food Uganda, 2022).

Among other recommendations, the UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024 calls upon countries to seize the opportunity of the next round of national climate plans (NDC3.0) and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to include food loss and/or waste reduction. The 2025 NDCs revision process provides a key opportunity to raise climate ambition by integrating food loss and waste.

Similarly, integrating comprehensive measures to tackle food waste within NBSAPs is another opportunity for fostering sustainable development, actioning target 16 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which specifically calls out halving global food waste by 2030.

The UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024 also call for food waste to be must be addressed at both individual and systemic levels, including targeted efforts in urban areas and international collaboration among countries and across supply chains. A good start is to focus on the young generation to grow up with sustainable food-related lifestyles

Read the full UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024 from here: <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/food-waste-index-report-2024>

Earth Day 2024 – Time for a *Tighter* Common Front to Control the Manufacture, Importation, Use and Sale of Single Use Plastics in East Africa



Open dumping of plastics in a wetland near Kampala. Photo: Kimbona Richard

Every year, humanity generates between 2.1 billion and 2.3 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste. Some 2.7 billion people lack access to waste collection, 2 billion of whom live in rural areas. Waste pollution significantly threatens human well-being, economic prosperity, and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution. Without urgent action, annual municipal solid waste generation will hit 3.8 billion tonnes by 2050 (UNEP, 2024).

In Uganda, community level action on single use plastics and used plastic bottles is currently through clean-up exercises organized by NGOs, cultural and religious institutions, schools and other groups in some localities. In some cases, recyclers pick the bottles and other plastics for re-use and sale. Otherwise, a bulk of the single use plastics is either illegally dumped in wetlands or burnt in the ‘open’ as the only ‘viable’ option.

Earthday.org warns that plastics are a danger to humanity and all living creatures, disrupting the delicate balance of life on Earth, and hence demands for a rapid phase out all single use plastics, and urgent push for a strong UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution, and call for an end to fast fashion. Under the 2024 theme: *Planet vs. Plastics*, Earthday.org calls for widespread awareness on the health risk of plastics, rapidly phase out all single use plastics, urgently push for a strong UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution, and demand an end to fast fashion.

According to IPEN (International Pollutants Elimination Network) - a global network of public interest organizations improving chemical policies and raising public awareness to ensure that hazardous substances are no longer produced, used, or disposed of in ways that harm human health and the environment, plastic production is growing and the companies that make plastics are claiming that recycling is the answer, while simultaneously promoting incineration of plastics as a way of meeting energy demand. But less than 10% of plastics are actually recycled!

As a region, Africa is one of the worst performers when it comes to managing solid waste, with the United Nations estimating that only 10% of plastic waste produced is appropriately managed, and without drastic changes, the total municipal plastic waste generated is projected to increase from 19.2 million tonnes in 2015 to 72 million tonnes per year by 2060 (UNEP, 2018). In Kampala alone, 150 tonnes of waste are generated every day of which only 40 per cent is collected. The remaining 60 per cent is left on its own, leading to a number of problems according to Dr Akankwasa Barirega – the Executive Director, NEMA Uganda (as quoted by *The Daily Monitor*, February 2022).

East Africa has been recognized as a leader in taking legislative action against plastic pollution, ever since Rwanda first implemented a strictly enforced plastic bag ban in 2008. All the seven EAC member states have passed legislation to ban plastic bags and several have enacted laws against certain single-use plastics, although there is little harmonization between the laws and, in many of the countries, the bans have not been strictly enforced, leading to ineffective outcomes (Flipflop Project, 2023).

The Flipflop Project (2023) further notes that, ‘the complexity around the application of policy frameworks as well as uneven enforcement of the bans across member states rotates around unclear policy frameworks; a lack of detailed guidelines on single use plastics; a resistance to the implementation of legislation; poor regulatory enforcement; cross-border smuggling of banned items; a lack of available, affordable, and accessible alternatives to single use plastics; and limited reporting on the successes and challenges of such legislation’.

In order to address the single use plastic challenge, the Flipflop Project calls on the EAC member states to come together to establish a legal framework to control the manufacture, importation, use and sale of single use plastics, that coordinates with existing regulations and agreements; allocate technical and financial support to the framework; establish monitoring and reporting structures that track progress and ensure compliance; develop suitable waste management infrastructure; promote the use of sustainable and reusable products and incentivize circular economy businesses and services; and lead awareness-raising campaigns to educate consumers and producers, among other key stakeholders.

Read more about Earth Day 2024 under the theme: *Planet vs. Plastics*: <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2024/>