

# FLOWING WITH PLASTICS

A look into how plastics are killing Uganda's rivers with emphasis on River Rwizi in western Uganda. This report offers a special focus on Coca-Cola's world without waste initiative.

**BRAND AUDIT 2022**

MAY 2022

VOL. 1



**#break  
free  
from  
plastic**

# About End Plastic Pollution

[End Plastic Pollution](#) envisions a future free from plastic. Since our launch in 2020, we have grown into an active group of youth environmental activists, students and volunteers demanding greater corporate accountability and corporate action to end plastic pollution. Corporations are endangering our future by continuing to produce single-use plastics. We are raising awareness towards the science of plastics, its effects on people, planet and climate and what corporate polluters need to do about it. Young voices matter because we will live with the heaviest consequences of the plastic and climate crises that our generation contributed to the least.

[End Plastic Pollution](#) is a core member of the global [Break Free From Plastic](#) movement.



*EPP Image 1 - Part of River Rwizi flowing with plastics at Buremba Village in Mbarara, Western Uganda*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[End Plastic Pollution](#) is calling upon corporations to commit to phase-out single-use plastics. *Flowing with Plastics* is a new report series that is focused on exposing false solutions proposed by the companies responsible for plastics waste found in our rivers. This first series focuses on River Rwizi in Western Uganda and The Coca-Cola Company, Uganda's top plastic polluter in 2021.



*EPP Image 2 - Save River Rwizi protest at Buremba Village*

Beginning 2021, our team of youth leaders and volunteers followed River Rwizi for 3 months documenting the extent of plastic waste and which brands contributed to it. Our team analyzed situations at three major areas on River Rwizi namely Lugazi, Kateete falls, Nyamitonga bridge Area and Buremba village. Findings from this research concluded that River Rwizi is the most visibly damaged river by plastic pollution in Uganda and we decided that the world should know about this.

On December 2, 2021 we launched a campaign to save River Rwizi with the major aim to;

- To help people understand plastics, its impacts to people, planet and how to avoid single-use plastics.
- To call for community level, national and regional reforms around plastic use and manufacturing. Hold plastic polluters accountable and promote zero-waste circular economy systems.
- To promote learning, art and skills sharing among the youth.
- To promote awareness through local media for communities along River Rwizi.

These activities were conducted involving youth in community based activities including collective cleanups on River Rwizi and protests in Mbarara City. The cleanup on River Rwizi is the most risky cleanup we have ever conducted because of the heavy running water. Also, rising water levels the day before the the cleanups posed a serious threat for many to drown. Nevertheless, we braved up and did a massive cleanup that was seen by over 56,100 people on Twitter, gaining over 188,162 impressions. We conducted a brand

audit on all the waste collected from River Rwizi, 537 items were audited exposing 56 brands belonging to 36 companies.



Figure 1 - River Rwizi Brand Audit 2021

Our #SaveRiverRwizi, protest helped spread the message to the streets of Mbarara, where even youth skaters participated in several rounds around Mbarara City and joined a group of environmental activists, local waste pickers and students. We also launched a special program for youth waste pickers within Mbarara City and hosted trainings for youth about Circular Economy practices and collective efforts to manage plastic so that it does not end up in the river.

Through the #SaveRiverRwizi we have engaged with over 500 youths including 60 youth waste pickers, students from schools, universities, local leaders from Mbarara City's Kateete Division, Buremba Village, and Mbarara City Corporate Business community.

At this point of reach by plastic waste, greater action and accountability by polluting companies is needed. Initiatives like [Brand Audits](#) are helping to expose these plastic polluting companies.

The process of [Brand Audits](#) are an action to document the names of companies that produced the plastic waste polluting our communities, and generates undeniable data that clearly informs the process of holding polluters accountable for the plastic and climate crises.

The Brand Audit on River Rwizi, 537 items were audited, involving 56 brands from 36 companies. One hundred eighty nine items belong to brands part of The Coca-Cola product family making 35.0% of the total collection.

The [Uganda Brand Audit](#) was conducted in Jinja Eastern Uganda at Masese Landing Site in partnership with Break Free From Plastic, 469 items were audited, belonging to 47 brands from 32 parent companies. The Coca-Cola Company is leading a pack of other top polluting multinationals including Unilever, The Campbell's Soup Company and Upfield. To make matters worse, local / regional manufacturers are also making huge amounts of single-use plastics with an excuse that they are making consumer goods affordable and accessible for the poor. These include Yaket and Hema Beverages who are making cheap bottled water for as low as UGX 500. Also among the top ten plastic polluters are companies Mukwano Industries and BIDCO Africa, they produce basic use products almost found in every home in Uganda.



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The [global Break Free From Plastic brand audit report](#) also revealed that The Coca-Cola Company is the world's largest plastic polluter. The Coca-Cola Company was recorded to have produced more plastic products than the next top two polluters, PepsiCo and Nestle combined.

It is no surprise that the company holds this position, The Coca-Cola Company is hugely investing in its expansion to make more single-use plastics to package its ever growing family of soft drinks brands. [The Coca-Cola Company now makes over 4,000,000 plastic bottles per week](#) that is 200,000,000 plastic bottles per year in Uganda but continues to promote false solutions under its "World Without Waste" initiative.

To end single-use plastic pollution we cannot rely on voluntary commitments and false solutions like The Coca-Cola Company's "World without Waste" initiative. Among the commitments made by The Coca-Cola Company is to collect every bottle for every one sold, however this has failed. Young people don't deserve to inherit the plastic and climate crises they did not create. We cannot wait until every river is flowing with plastics.

*This is why this part one of Flowing with Plastics highlights the urgent need for eliminating single-use plastics by corporations like The Coca-Cola Company. Corporations must Reveal, Reduce and Redesign to end plastic pollution. Our future is not disposable. What is damaged must be restored and our environment must be protected for future generations to inherit.*

*"I will tell you what will really help,  
stop making so much polluting  
packaging"*

EMMA PRIESTLAND / BREAK FREE FROM PLASTIC



## DEDICATION

We dedicate this report to people living in communities most affected by plastic waste.

And to all End Plastic Pollution Uganda Youth Volunteers, Environmental activists, Students in Schools, Universities and All African Youth fighting for a plastic-free world.

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**We demand government to take serious action to end plastic pollution, put strict measures to hold plastic polluters accountable.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate our [End Plastic Pollution](#) youth volunteers, youth environmental activists, students in schools and universities and all people in communities that participated our campaign activities.

We appreciate our ever growing digital community that follows us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and follows our [web platform](#). Thank you for giving us sharing our work and supporting.

In a special way we want to extend our sincere thanks to all the organizations that took part in the Save River Rwizi campaign activities. Thanks to [Flipflopi](#) for the support towards the success of this campaign activities in Mbarara City. Thanks to Plastik Talks and [InfoNile](#) for joining us and to The Innovation Village Mbarara for hosting Save River Rwizi campaign activities. We thank The French Embassy in Uganda for the generous support through Alliance Francaise towards the Save River Rwizi Campaign activities.

Finally we want to thank our global partners at [Break Free From Plastic](#) and [GAIA](#) for the support towards the Brand Audits conducted in 2021 activities. For the guidance, trainings on how to conduct Brand Audits and for welcoming End Plastic Pollution as member to these global networks.

## INTRODUCTION.

Uganda has a very large freshwater ecosystem with many rivers and lakes, however plastic waste has become very dangerous in our environment and Rivers like River Rwizi are now flowing with plastics.

What is happening to River Rwizi is important to focus on for it is a show of a larger threat to Uganda's natural water system. This year our team of youth leaders and volunteers



*EPP Image 3 - Tilapia Fish (Engege) from Lake Victoria at Ggaba Landing Site*

followed River Rwizi for three months documenting the extent of reach by plastic waste and which brands contributed to it. Our team analyzed situations at three major areas on River Rwizi namely Lugazi, Kateete falls, Nyamitonga bridge Area and Buremba village.

According to InfoNile there are 23 inlet Rivers into Lake Victoria and only one outlet the River Nile. In “Nyanja Nalubale” known as Lake Victoria, plastic materials are killing and choking fish, what survives finds its way on our food plates. Research

has confirmed that almost 20% of Tilapia “Engege” and Nile Perch “Empuuta” caught in Lake Victoria have ingested micro plastics.



*EPP Image 4 - A giant fish sculpture installed by Plastik Talks and End Plastic Pollution at Ggaba Landing Site*

The plastic pollution problem in Uganda is beyond individual actions nor can it rely on voluntary commitments by polluters. The plastics industry has for a long time maintained its destructive linear system of business operations where companies produce, consumers use once and then throwaway. This must change.

*To strengthen the Brand Audit 2021 efforts on*

*December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021 we launched a campaign to save River Rwizi with the major aim to; (1) call for community level,*

*national and regional reforms around plastic use and manufacturing. (2) Hold plastic polluters accountable and (3) zero-waste circular economy systems.*

Corporations like The Coca-Cola Company are investing heavily in production plants and distribution channels as they expand their brand families with new products. The Coca-Cola Company has commenced production at its recently installed USD 15 million production in Namanve. By 2030 Coca-Cola will have made its 2 billionth plastic bottle in Uganda.

There is a link between plastics and Uganda’s battle with increasing heat levels, prolonged droughts, heavy stormy rains, floods and landslides in the Rwenzori region districts like Kasese and areas around the Elgon ranges like Bududa. Research has now proved that plastic is a significant contributor to the climate crisis. Consumer goods companies like The Coca-Cola Company are enabling the fossil fuel industry’s expansion of plastic production. This decision undermines humanity’s chances of keeping the global temperature rise below the 1.5°C as by the Paris Agreement. According to Beyond Plastic’s new report on plastics and climate change titled The New Coal, plastic production is the last gasp of the fossil fuel industry.

Uganda has one of the world’s youngest population making about 75% of the entire population below 35 years. The Coca-Cola Company needs to listen to young people not because they are consumers of tomorrow, but more importantly because they will suffer the most from long-term consequences of this crisis.



As an agro-based economy, Uganda has much to lose due to increasing plastic pollution. 70% of Uganda’s working population is directly employed in the Agricultural sector, Uganda produces a wide range of agricultural products including, coffee, tea, sugar, livestock, cereals and much more.

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With huge amounts of plastic waste getting into the most remote places of the country, the Agriculture sector is at risk. Plastics are finding their way to farmlands through many ways hence altering the physical and biological properties of soils. Micro plastics have been confirmed to threaten life in the ground, killing important creatures like earthworms, blocking soil's aeration, weakening its decomposition ability and lowering soil nutrient levels leading to poor soils with inability to support plant life. Micro plastics have confirmed the capability to pass through plant tissue. Communities western Uganda that graze cows and other animals directly depend on water in River Rwizi for their animals to drink.



*EPP image 5 - Save River Rwizi Campaign activities in Mbarara*

As the plastic waste gets into River Rwizi water it exposes them to drinking water with micro plastics which contaminates both the meat and milk. Cattle rearing is the most commonly practiced human activity in Western Uganda offering survival for millions of people. Fish is one of the most high value commodities that contributes to economic growth in Uganda with more than 350 fish species. Fishing contributes about 3% to Uganda's gross domestic product and 12% to agriculture sector GDP, employing about 1.5 million people. According to InfoNile, 20% of fish caught in Lake Victoria including "Engege" Tilapia and "Empuuta" Nile Perch has been confirmed to have ingested micro plastics yet it is a major source of food. Therefore the entire Agriculture sector in Uganda must be protected against plastic pollution to continue its contribution to both the economy and food baskets.

Uganda was named the "Pearl of Africa" for its beauty and is attracting lots of Tourists. However plastic pollution on Rivers like River Rwizi is a direct threat to the future of the Tourism sector. Many of Uganda's make their journeys through very important biodiversity, 23 Rivers pour waters into Lake Victoria and only one outlet the River Nile. They go through forests, national parks and game reserves.

The damage at Buremba Village on River Rwizi in Mbarara has already cost the city's tourism potential. Just like many Rivers in Uganda, River Rwizi also journeys through Lake Mburo National Park putting wildlife at risk. River Rwizi is also connected to River Mpanga which goes through Uganda's major Tourism city of Fort Portal. Tourism contributes much to Uganda's growth and brings in millions of dollars. Tourism has been singled out as Uganda's largest foreign income earner, contributing about 7% to Uganda's growth domestic product.



*EPP 6 - Save River Rwizi Campaign Protest at Buremba in Mbarara*

**Even when people want to avoid plastics, they are provided with no options, companies are only creating products to be disposable.**

## CHAPTER 01

### THE PROBLEM



Figure 7 - Coca-Cola's Response on Social Media after watching a video from Nirere Sadrach from End Plastic Pollution

It is simple, plastic polluting companies have ignored taking steps to eliminate their addiction to single-use plastic packaging.

River Rwizi is the most important water body in Western Uganda (Ankole Region). Its beauty and attractions are praised by the people of the Ankole region. River Rwizi plays a significant role in the existence of the ecosystem as it flows through and provides for all communities in abundance. As a pride of the Ankole region the river has been made heritage and never misses in a must see conversation about the Ankole region and the city of Mbarara.

River Rwizi is now a major water source for Agricultural activities like farming and livestock rearing. The region is a big producer of Bananas, Irish potatoes, Tea, Coffee and the biggest Dairy products producer. Commercial and industrial use of River Rwizi is increasing as producers establish production facilities around its banks. River Rwizi plays a great role in the tourism sector for its journey through natural forests, hills and national parks harboring national parks. It takes its waters through Lake Mburo and pours them into Lake Victoria.

River Rwizi is Uganda’s most visibly damaged River by plastic pollution in a time when initiatives like The Coca-Cola Company’s “World without Waste” are supposed to help but cannot.

A brand audit conducted on River Rwizi involved 537 items, out of the 537 items that were audited, 508 items were food packaging, making 95% of the entire waste collected compared to 29 items about 5.0% for personal care products. By Materials type (PET, HDPE, LDPE, PP, PVC), PET items more so plastic bottles were 315 making 59.0%, HDPE items were 116 which is 22.0%, LDPE items were 105 which is 20.0%. One hundred eighty nine items belonged to Coca-Cola, making 35% of the total waste collected.

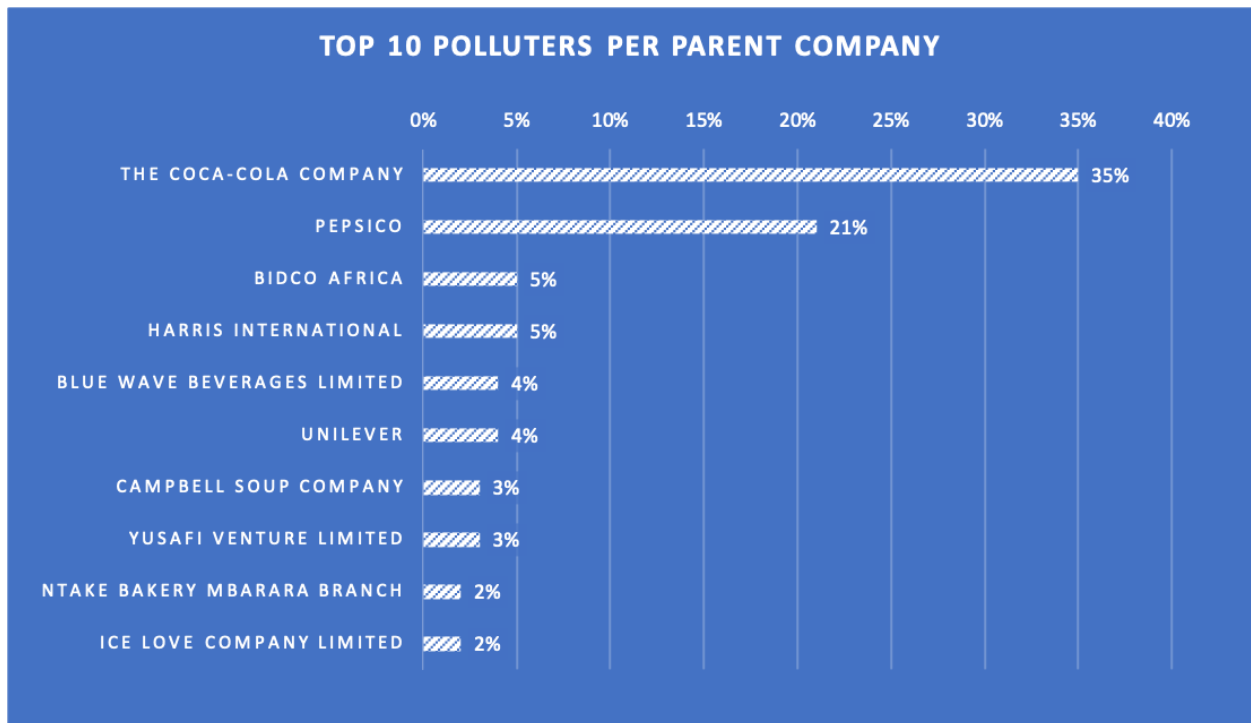


Figure 8 River Rwizi Brand Audit results 2021

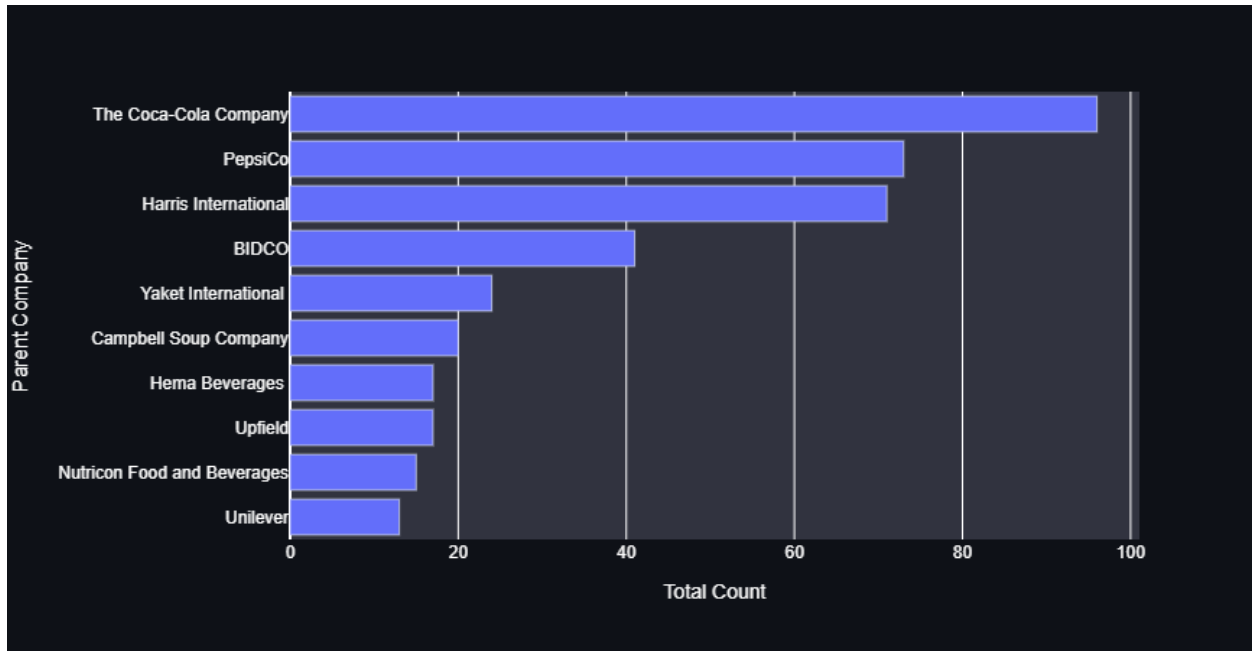


Figure 9- Uganda Brand Audit results conducted on Lake Victoria in Jinja, 2021

Also, plastic waste found in 3 communities of Kateete, Nyamitonga Bridge area and Buremba Village was mostly contributed by The Coca-Cola Company, the same company claiming to create a “World without Waste”. By polluting River Rwizi with plastics, The Coca-Cola Company is putting over 10 million lives in danger. River Rwizi waters start the journey from the hills of Buhweju to Ntungamo, Sheema, Mbararara, Kasese, Rubirizi, Mitoma, Rwampara, Isingiro, Rakai, Kyotera, Lyantonde among others.



According to the Uganda Brand Audit 2021 conducted in Jinja, consumer goods mostly food packaging and personal care products contribute the largest amount of plastic waste in Uganda. Out of the 469 items that were audited, 418 were food packaging making 49% of the entire waste collected compared to 50 items about 11% for personal care products. By Materials type (PET, HDPE, LDPE, PP, PVC), PET items more so plastic bottles were 228 making 49.0% and HDPE items were 129 which is 22.0% of the

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total audited items.



Read Report here: <https://bit.ly/3neSrrt>

The brand audit done on River Rwizi and the one done on Lake Victoria, all show that Multinationals are the biggest plastic polluters in Uganda led by The Coca-Cola Company despite its claims to care about the environment. The Coca-Cola Company has deliberately continued its reliance on single-use plastics and invested heavily in greenwashing their dirty image. In 2018 The Coca-Cola Company launched its “World without Waste” initiative which seemed an ambitious environmental program. However with evidence exposed by the brand audits conducted so far, initiatives like Coca-Cola’s “World without Waste” have been proved a failure.

One aim to note of The Coca-Cola Company’s “World without Waste” initiative is collecting and recycling each and every bottle sold.

The Coca-Cola pays a mere UGX 1000 which is less than half a dollar for one kilogram of plastics collected.

This is too little compared to the unhealthy conditions waste pickers go through. For each kilogram, a waste picker needs about 35 - 45 bottles yet is required to make one ton of plastic an equivalent of 1000 kilograms so as to be eligible to sale, this discourages many waste pickers. The recycling plant is located in Kampala yet Coca-Cola’s products are consumed country wide, upcountry waste pickers cannot get their collections to Kampala.

***The “World without Waste” initiative sounds very promising but has not been achieved instead The Coca-Cola Company is creating a world full of plastic waste. The Coca-Cola Company has failed to collect every bottle it sells leaving it to end up in our environment.***

Coca-Cola says people want more plastic bottles and says it will not change its polluting ways because customers wouldn’t like it and sales will fall. To be able to maintain business as usual The Coca-Cola company dictates what are opportunities to its consumers and which changes should they see.

The Coca-Cola Company has failed to redesign its packaging to eliminate single-use by making refillables. Coca-Cola has made it clear that it is struggling to maximize the use of less virgin fossil materials. Even when global recycling levels are 9% low, The Coca-

Cola company instead of prioritizing reuse and refill, it is focusing on making its packaging recyclable. However The Coca-Cola Company clearly knows recycling will not help end the plastic pollution crisis.

According to Coca-Cola 2020 World without Waste report, products are only recyclable where infrastructure exists. However with the Coca-Cola company making 4,000,000 plastic bottles per week in Uganda, even their own recycling plant cannot handle or intake this amount. Neither do countries like Uganda have the infrastructure to manage all the waste generated. Also the company clearly mentions that its use of recycled materials is only for selected global primal consumer packaging, however none of its products in Uganda is considered global since they are produced for consumption at a lower market.

In Uganda  
Coca-Cola  
makes  
**4,000,000**  
single-use  
plastic bottles  
per week



How can a company claiming to be working towards a World without Waste produce three metric tons of plastic a year equivalent to 108 billion plastic bottles?

The other question is, can Coca-Cola achieve its World without Waste by 2030 solving a systematic problem it has created for several decades? Now that we have about eight years.

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*EPP Image 10 - Plastic pollution on River Rwizi at Buremba in Mbarara.*

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Our “Flowing with Plastics” part one report message rhymes along with what we earlier made clear in the [Uganda National Brand Audit 2021](#). We want to continue with the same demands and propose the same recommendations.



*EPP Image 11 - Uganda Brand Audit Activity at Masese Landing Site in Jinja*

#### 1. Corporate plastic polluters should be held accountable.

Even when people want to avoid plastic waste, they are provided with no options, companies are only creating products to be disposables. We have for so long accepted to be taken as just mere customers, people should get it clear that, disposable products are cheap for industry, but costly for the rest of us.

Plastic pollution is an increasing problem for many communities in Uganda. Coca-Cola is producing over 4,000,000 million throwaway bottles, which is about 200,000,000 million plastic bottles made for a single-use purpose. Globally the company is making over 200,000 plastic bottles per minute which amount to over three million tons of plastic a year most of which end up unrecycled in landfills.

At this point we cannot rely on voluntary commitments by Coca-Cola claiming to care about the environment, these are making little difference. The Coca-Cola Company is already aware of what is happening but continues to run a destructive linear business model.

***We demand plastic-polluting corporations like Coca-Cola to REVEAL their total plastic footprint, REDUCE the amount of plastic***

*produced and **REDESIGN** their product delivery systems to recollect, refill and reuse.*

## REVEAL

Companies need to be transparent about the number of units of plastic packaging they produce.

While conducting Brand Audits we found many brands also not well labeled or detailed. They lacked clear information about the manufacturers and the type of plastic material used.

The addiction to single-use Plastics is driving the continued extraction of fossil fuels. If plastic's lifecycle (Extraction, Transport,

Refining, Manufacture, and Waste Management) were a country, it would be the fifth largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. Therefore it is very important that the companies reveal the total greenhouse gas emissions associated with their plastic use.



*EPP Image 12 - Protest at Kabuuma - Kampala*

## REDUCE

Instead of investing in more plastics production, Companies must be drastically reducing their reliance on plastic use in absolute terms by units, weights and set clear measurable targets that are tracked publicly.

## REDESIGN

The only way Coca-Cola can cut plastic use is to design alternative methods of delivering products to customers without single-use plastic. Reusable packaging has been around for centuries and combined with modern technology, it is used by companies today. Coca-Cola needs to redesign their business model to focus on reusable packaging that is safe, affordable and accessible for all.

To date: Only 1.9% of plastic packaging used or produced by top polluting corporations in 2019 was reusable.

Earlier this year a team from Coca-Cola joined by Mbarara University of Science and Technology, the Ministry Water and Environment, Lake Victoria Water Management Zone and local government officials inspected River Rwizi to ascertain the level of plastic

pollution. The purpose of this visit is not clear, the findings were never released neither can they be accessed through the University.



*EPP Image 13 - Protest at Kabuuma - Kampala*

***Instead of investing in more plastics production, Companies must be drastically reducing their reliance on plastic use in absolute terms by units, weights and set clear measurable targets that are tracked publicly.***

**2. We demand the government to take serious action to end plastic pollution put strict measures to hold plastic polluters accountable.**

Uganda is the second land locked country to join the UN Clean Seas campaign to keep plastic pollution out of its lakes and rivers. The Clean Seas campaign contributes to goals set in the Global Partnership on Marine Litter. While joining, Uganda was made aware of the fact that there is a biodiversity breakdown, the climate emergency and rampant pollution. In an article published by the UNEP, Uganda makes it clear that this is because of unsustainable production which triggers irresponsible consumption.



*Figure 13 - Brand Audit Activity at Masese Landing Site in Jinja*



*Image 14 - End Plastic Pollution youth volunteers during Brand Audit activities at Masese Landing Site in Jinja*

Uganda has also positively reacted towards the Global Plastics Treaty while countries like South African still want reservations that allow continuity of plastics trade, production and use with no control. The treaty is aiming at fostering a multilateral approach to solving the plastic pollution crisis. UNCTAD estimates show that the global trade in plastics has reached \$ 1 Trillion per year, which is 5% of the total merchandise trade. UNCTAD in its official paper Enabling Concerted Multilateral Action on Plastic Pollution, notes the need for solutions at the source of production and at the consumer level.

By Uganda joining the Clean Seas campaign and positively responding to the global plastics treaty processes, it is clear that it is ready to implement strict measures towards protecting the environment and hold corporate polluters accountable, but it is not.

In March 2021 the government through the Minister for Water and Environment passed new environment measures. She warned the plastic manufacturers to find alternatives

ways to manage the waste they generate. This happened at the sidelines of launching the Uganda National Recovery Plan which intends to use the NEMA act as one of its major implementation instruments. In these new measures government tasked industrialists to take responsibility of emissions and disposal of waste. Government of Uganda also took a clear stand on single-use items like plastic bags commonly used as packaging and carrying purposes. A plastic bag is given to a customer almost on every item one buys in a shop anywhere in Uganda.

Despite all these efforts and pronouncements by the government through the Ministry of Water and Environment none of these can be put into action. On the same day of the pronouncements the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) confirmed in a Twitter post that these were just verbal pronouncements, there are no legal instruments to implement them.

If these measures were put into operations, it can bring into account the plastic polluters, control the manufacturing and use of plastics. It would help create an aware population inspired to avoid single-use plastics and can become productive to drive the circular economy. These measures can help to push manufacturers to reveal, reduce and innovatively redesign to eliminate single-use plastics.

Government should enforce meaningful regulations on plastic polluting corporations.

Government must decide and shift away from fossil fuel. Our leaders should not allow further expansion of oil and petrochemical plants to manufacture more plastics. Time to phase-out investments for single-use plastics production.

The Uganda national climate action plan should prioritize investments in Waste Reduction Measures and Zero-waste circular economy systems.

The National Environment Management Authority should emphasize that companies like Coca-Cola follows guidelines of the “ESI Certificate”. This license is given to companies on the basis of showing compliance to environmental impact and waste management controls. According to the terms of issuing this certificate the company must ensure that their products are consumed safely and disposed of properly. It allows companies to hire collectors on their behalf instead of them taking the responsibility to recollect. It is for this reason that Coca-Cola’s World Without Waste initiative is failing to address the plastic pollution crisis created by the company despite the aim being collecting every bottle sold.

### 3. Waste Pickers must be empowered.



*EPP Image 15 - Youth waste pickers preparing for the Save River Rwizi campaign in Mbarara*

Uganda has an opportunity to grow a zero-waste economy. According to the GAIA a network supporting cities to transition to zero waste it defines this process as; The consumption of all resources by means of responsible production, packaging, reuse and recovery of products, packaging

and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water or air that threaten the environment and human health.

For Uganda to transition to zero waste, there has to be recognition of the role played by waste pickers. Waste pickers are known as “informal plastic collectors” or “aba kasasiro” are at the cornerstone of recycling in global south cities including Kampala City.

During the Save River Rwizi activities in Mbarara city. We also mobilized a group of 60 youth waste picker to participate in our Save River Rwizi activities in Mbarara City in Uganda. They joined the cleanup activities at Buremba village and were part of the Circular Economy training held at the Innovation Village. Waste pickers are helping to expand the lifespan of landfills by diverting recyclable material away. They have job creation potential and increase the rate of recycling by re-entering materials into the economy.

However despite their societal, environmental and economic role, waste pickers across Uganda have many challenges. These range from social stigmas, to abuse from municipal or security officials on landfills who prevent them from accessing certain waste to make their livelihoods.





*EPP Image 16 - Youth waste pickers gathered to participate in the Save River activities in Mbarara*

Other challenges include waste pickers receiving varied incomes from middlemen in exchange for recycling materials. Middlemen act as intermediaries between the waste pickers and recyclers whom they sell the materials from waste pickers at a profit. They determine prices and waste pickers have no control in addressing this individually.

Coca Cola says it buys a kilogram of plastic waste at USD 0.3 only yet it demands that one collects 1000 kilograms (one ton) to be eligible to sell to its recycling facility. However despite this amount being so small compared to waste pickers in countries like South Africa, waste pickers in Uganda are paid a meagre USD 0.08 per kilogram. For one to collect plastic bottles to make a kilogram need to find between 35 and 45 bottles.

Waste pickers are also faced discrimination from municipal officials preventing them from accessing landfills. Furthermore, waste pickers work in dangerous and unhealthy conditions without the necessary tools and protective equipment. Waste pickers have been looked down on, stigmatized as being uneducated, homeless, and unaware of the value of resources at the landfill.

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