



## Recyclers Confront the Plastic Peril in a Kampala Slum

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An association of women has vowed to remove 100,000 plastic bags from the Kinawataka slum district of Kampala, where they live, in a determined attempt to repel a plastic invasion that is clogging drains, sickening children, and killing animals.

The campaign will be launched by the Kinawataka Women Initiatives (KIWOI) under the leadership of Benedicta Nanyonga, a prominent Ugandan advocate for the environment and women's rights. KIWOI has been a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP) since 2011.



**Plastic sickens kids and kills cows**

Ms Nanyonga offered a graphic account of the plastic crisis in a [recent video interview](#) with [Shannon Orcutt](#), who is serving as an AP Peace Fellow at KIWOI this summer. "Polythene bags are thrown everywhere" she said. "They break the drainage (so that) when it rains, water is kept there and mosquitoes use the chance to multiply. People are burning waste. Animals eat anything they can get, including the polythene bags, which is very dangerous to them."

KIWOI plans to use a novel method to remove the 100,000 plastic bags. The group makes shopping bags from recycled straws that last for years, unlike polythene bags which are discarded immediately. Ms Nanyonga would like to give out 300 straw bags to stores, to be given to regular customers. Customers would be charged more if they forget to bring their straw bags.

KIWOI tested this idea out in 2012 with two shops in Kinawataka. Peace Fellow Shannon Orcutt visited the shopkeepers last week and found them keen to resume the experiment. Nantale Bilungi Immaculate, who owns the Mbuya Shopping Center, said that some customers are still using the bags from 2012: "Our customers were happy because (the bags) are very strong and they looked nice. If you shop with it, you are looking smart."



**Benedicta Nanyonga (right) with straw trainees**

The economics also make sense. Ms. Immaculate gives out 120 plastic bags to customers each day, at a cost of \$14. If half her customers were to take straw bags, she would save \$2,500 a year. Ms. Orcutt has identified five shops that want to take part.



**Put to good use: These KIWOI bags were each made from 4,000 straws**

The project could be a win-win, because it would take straws and plastic bags out of the environment while also creating jobs. In 2013, KIWOI turned over three million straws into 730 bags and provided work for 43 women. KIWOI also cares for 15 orphans.

Ms Nanyonga's vision, helped by a puckish sense of humor and boundless energy, has turned her into a celebrity. This year alone, she has spoken [at the UN Council of Human Rights in Geneva](#), been named one of Uganda's 40 most inspiring women, received an award from the [International Alliance](#)

[of Women](#) in Washington, appeared on a panel at Georgetown University, and [featured in a documentary](#). Ms Nanyonga has also met President Paul Kagame of Rwanda (which has abolished plastic bags) and President Museveni of Uganda. Her appearance at Georgetown was arranged by former KIWOI [Peace Fellow Meron Menwyelet](#).

While Ms Nanyonga is lionized by social entrepreneurs, the production of straw bags is labor-intensive, as shown [in this video](#) by former Peace Fellow Scarlett Chidgey, and not keeping pace with demand. Flattening the straws is done by hand, using a knife, and can take several minutes per straw.





**From Uganda to Washington: Benedicta, left, and Hajjat Aphwa Sebaya after receiving awards from the [International Alliance for Women](#). They are holding the Butonde (Nature) Quilt, made at KIWOI from 10,000 recycled straws.**

AP purchased a heat press for KIWOI in the U.S. which was even featured on Ugandan television. But while the press flattens straws, it does not soften them for the weaving. Any entrepreneurs who would like to help are invited to contact AP or KIWOI.

KIWOI and AP are now preparing to move ahead with the plastic campaign. The threat from plastic is described [on a new KIWOI website](#), a [strong video by Ms. Orcutt](#), and in [new partner pages on the AP site](#). KIWOI has also applied to join the [Plastic Pollution Coalition](#), a

rapidly-growing international network.

- [Contact AP](#) with innovative ideas on straw pressing
- Read the blogs of Peace Fellows [Scarlett](#), [Katie](#), [Meron](#) and [Shannon](#)
- Visit the new KIWOI [catalog](#) and [website](#)
- Visit the new [KIWOI partner pages](#), and read about the Butonde (Nature) Quilt, on the AP website
- Watch [videos on KIWOI](#)
- View [photos on KIWOI](#).