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Waste management in East Africa

(Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania)

In concise...

Waste management in the region is a major challenge in East Africa and requires concrete action to aim toward a more circular economy. The amount of waste produced has increased considerably between 2016 and 2019 in the East African countries covered here (+28 % for Kenya; +48 % in Tanzania; +94 % in Ethiopia; +45 % in Uganda). The lion's share of the waste produced in the region is organic and only a small amount is collected—with the exception of certain capital cities—and it's only marginally recovered or recycled. Although countries are beginning to take the matter into account through the implementation of guiding policies, the **available financial and human resources fall short**. Therefore, given the lack of garbage collection systems and storage, recovery or recycling infrastructure, **the private sector as well as development partners, and in some cases, community initiatives, play a vital role.**

In detail...

Exponential growth of waste due to rapid urbanization

East Africa is characterized by an increase in waste generation notably due to population growth, rapid urbanization, an emerging middle class and changing consumption habits. The Kenyan population increased its waste generation by almost 28 % between 2016 and 2019, + 45 % in Uganda and by almost 94% in Ethiopia. However, the production of waste per capita in East Africa is still among the lowest in the world, 0.53 kg/capita per day compared to 1.38 kg/capita per day in France. Organic waste represents 57 % of the waste generated in the area, more than the world average (46%) where the proportion of paper and plastic waste is higher. The percentage of collected garbage varies significantly within the region: 88 % in Kigali; 70 % in Addis Ababa; 56 % in Kampala. Waste collection and transport

services exist mainly in urban centers (55% collection coverage), with peri-urban and rural areas being much less well served (9 % collection).

The collected waste is usually dumped and burnt in open spaces, along roads in rural areas or in waterways. While some cities, especially capital cities, have designated waste disposal sites with controlled access, such as the *Dandora* waste dump in Nairobi or *Kiteezi* in Kampala, most of these have long exceeded their capacity. On average, only 20 % of the waste is deposited in a waste dump with an access-control system. Often, waste is dumped in open air, where waste-processing mechanisms are poor and water table protection systems are non-existent. The recycling rate is estimated at only 4 %, and is generally handled by private companies (*Takataka* Solutions, Mr Green Africa in Kenya, *Agruni* in Rwanda, *Tembo Steel* in Uganda), supported by a large and active informal sector that includes itinerant buyers and waste collectors.

Constituting a significant source, waste imports require management. Nearly 1.5 Mt of end-of-life waste were exported from Europe to the African continent in 2019. Changing lifestyles are also driving significant growth in the amount of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), representing a 1 Mt increase on the continent between 2014 and 2019. Indeed, Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania produced 51,300 tonnes, 55,200 tonnes and 50,200 tonnes of WEEE respectively in 2019.

Public authorities face a lack of human resources, financial means and clear policies

Good governance is vital to creating an enabling environment for sustainable waste management. **In East Africa, waste management is a responsibility of public authorities, at the national level, like in Ethiopia, or at a more decentralized level, as in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.** All of these countries have enacted laws to regulate the sector, and have precise targets. Kenya aims to develop its waste management system and raise its waste recycling level to 95 % by 2050, while Ethiopia aims for a 50 % waste recycling rate by 2023. All these countries have a regulatory authority for the environmental sector, which includes waste management. The National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) in Kenya and Uganda ensures that government guidelines are implemented in the country. Some countries have been more radical in plastic waste reduction including Rwanda which banned the use of plastic bags as early as 2004. Tanzania's ban came in 2015 while Kenya outlawed the manufacture, import and sale of single use bags in 2017. **The countries have also signed several international conventions related to waste treatment** including the one on WEEE and the Basel Convention in 1992 – prohibits transboundary movements of waste classified as hazardous. At the East African community level, the member states (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda) adopted a joint strategy in 2017 of 1.7 million USD to put in place infrastructure regarding W3E management regulation.

In view of this situation, **there is a pressing need for waste management to protect the health of the inhabitants and conserve the environment. However, the challenge lies mainly in funding.** The share of budget allocated to local authorities (in countries where government functions are decentralized) is insufficient and does not allow the implementation of an accessible and efficient waste management system and/or the implementation of sustainable projects. For instance, on average, between 2010 and 2020, Nairobi allocated only 2 % of its budget to waste collection and transportation. Therefore, even though some projects are in the pipeline—*Waste to Energy project at the Dandora waste dump in Nairobi and the Dundu waste development project in Uganda*—, capital-related obstacles impede their progress.

Development partners support and private sector engagement are essential in complementing measures taken by public authorities

Due to public authorities' budget shortfalls, insufficient garbage collection services, and a lack of infrastructure particularly dedicated to recycling or waste recovery, the private sector is taking over.

In Rwanda, the sector was privatized in the early 2000s, while in Tanzania, the municipal councils in charge of waste management contracted private companies to provide collection in the major cities. The decentralized approach to waste management has enabled the government to enter into public-private partnerships (PPPs). **The private players who provide the collection service generally charge a collection fee to households or businesses.** Thus, the collection service is reserved for the most affluent households and businesses. Rural areas and the more disadvantaged areas (often faced with geographical accessibility challenges) do not benefit from a private waste collection service.

Despite the significant use of informal workers, the economic model of these companies remains fragile. Recycling is still not widely practiced by the companies despite the potential revenue gains that could be obtained from the sale of resulting by-products or even from recovery. This is because the necessary infrastructure would sometimes require significant investment.

The support of donors (*financing and technical assistance*) is therefore essential for the proper functioning of the waste management sector in most countries of the zone. For example, the French Development Agency (AFD) has contributed to the *Flipflop* plastic pollution awareness initiative on Lake Victoria. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), on the other hand, has been involved in the mobilization against plastic pollution in Kenya. **Community-based organizations and the informal sector are key players in providing the waste management service.** The informal sector is growing and remains a particularly cheap source of labour, with companies actively mobilizing their services thus creating jobs. Similarly, community initiatives focus their activities in low-income areas and contribute to making neighborhoods cleaner, as in the case of the *Kwa-Muhia* Environmental Group in Kenya. The Rwandese case, particularly well developed, is an exception in the region where people come together monthly during *umuganda* to carry out public cleaning operations.

In sum...

Despite a significant increase in the waste produced in the recent past, the lack of financial and human resources impedes efficient waste management by public institutions. The private sector, donors and community-based initiatives have thus jumped in to complement these institutions, but insufficient capital remains a major challenge in effective implementation of waste management.

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