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It's time Kenyans learnt how to live without plastic bags

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Plastic paper bags will no longer be used as ban takes effect from next week. FILE PHOTO | NMG

When the clock strikes midnight on Monday August 28, 2017, it will be illegal to handle, use, sell or distribute plastics bags anywhere in Kenya.

This follows the decision early this year by the government to ban the manufacture, importation and use of polythene bags.

The ban was contained in a Kenya Gazette notice by Environment secretary Judi Wakhungu. It affects carrier bags and flat bags used for commercial and household packaging.

Plastic bags have been an important part of our lives for a long time. They are cheap, convenient and widely available. You drop by the supermarket in the evening, do your shopping and the purchased items are neatly wrapped in one or several plastic bags.

If you are a keen shopper, you will have noticed that a number of items you pick from the shelves such as bread, salt, rice, sugar, tissue paper, among others are already packed in polythene bags.

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Admittedly, this makes the shopping experience very convenient. No worries and no charges.

On your way out, you remember you need some fruits and vegetables so you drop by the grocery store. You pick your stuff and the attendant packs the same for you in clean, well designed polythene bags.

Should you take a detour to the nearby boutique to pick some clothing items or the mobile shop to purchase an electronic gadget, chances are all these will be packed in plastic bags.

Now comes the hard part. You get home with the dozens of multicoloured, multilayered plastic bags and you wonder what to do with them.

Few of us, if any, return to the supermarket or grocery store with the same plastic bag from last time. They mostly dump them in the kitchen store where the larger, thicker ones, may be reused as rubbish bins or for carrying various items within the home but ultimately, they find their way into the environment.

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Plastic bags are a menace. They are not only unsightly but they also don't biodegrade, at least not easily. Some perch on trees, some get buried in the soils and others find their way into water systems, including rivers, lakes and oceans.

They contaminate soils and water systems and harm life on land and water. Reports indicate that by 2050, global waters will have more plastic than fish, unless drastic measures are taken.

Kenyans must henceforth adopt a new lifestyle. Let us call it the "Kiondo Lifestyle." This lifestyle will have to revolve around the kiondo, a handwoven handbag made from sisal with leather trimmings. When going shopping, remember to carry along your kiondo.

When leaving home in the morning, remember to carry your kiondo. You might just need it. If you have a car, remember to have one, good sized, kiondo permanently in your car.

And when on safari, don't forget your kiondo. You might come across some items you need at affordable prices.

The Kiondo Lifestyle may not be convenient but we can make it fashionable. Kiondo isn't just kiondo. It accounts for a significant part of SDG-14 (Life in Water) and SDG-15 (Life on Land).

It means an environment free of plastics. It stands for a cleaner, safer and healthier environment. It represents a sustainable future. I stand for a Kiondo Lifestyle.

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