



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## Plastic recycling

Cameroon produces about 600,000 tons of plastics, mostly in the form of disposable shopping bags, every year.

Disposable plastics pose a major environmental and waste management problem, constituting about 70 to 80 percent of household waste in Cameroon.

Plastics in nature reduce soil fertility, destroy microorganisms, block waterways and have been shown to kill wildlife and fish. Because of this, the environment ministry recently banned light plastic shopping bags as a way to gradually reduce overall plastics production and use in the country.

Others have suggested that the problems related to plastics can be resolved in other ways, such as recycling. An innovative approach being tried in Yaounde is the production of cobblestones from recycled plastics.

# The Weekly for Cameroon Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

## The Problem with Plastic Waste

Plastics take as many as 1000 years to breakdown naturally. This period is so long that it is safe to refer to plastics as non-biodegradable.

Each year, tons of plastics from household and industrial use end up in nature: landfills, rivers, streams and farmlands.

According to the ministry of the environment, the impact is felt in diverse sectors, including agricultural and livestock production.

Plastics reduce soil quality in many ways, including the reduction of circulation of fluids, minerals and oxygen; the destruction of microorganisms; and the compaction of soil.

It has been shown that livestock and fish may die after ingesting plastics. When they block waterways, plastics cause flooding that can destroy fishery breeding grounds, wash out fish ponds, and inundate farmlands.

One approach to solve the problem caused by plastics is to stop them from entering nature in the first place. That is why many countries, including Cameroon, have banned plastic shopping bags or made them expensive to discourage their use.

An even more effective approach is to remove plastics from nature by turning them from waste to other useful products. There are many plastics recycling techniques and approaches in Cameroon.

# Activities for Journalists

Putting waste to profitable use is both ancient and a motivation for daily ingenuity around the world.

Almost every community practices some kind of recycling: producing compost from household and farm waste or footballs from old clothes, for example.

The recycling of plastic waste has particularly been the focus of many innovative ideas for several reasons. The most prominent is that plastics are durable and thus environmentally destructive when left in nature.

Removing plastics from nature and turning them into useful products has thus become both a challenge and an opportunity.

A project, funded by football legend Roger Milla through his foundation Coeur d'Afrique, is a perfect example of how social entrepreneurs are tackling the plastic challenge and seeing an opportunity. It involves using waste plastics to produce cobblestones.

The idea appears simple.

When plastics are heated up, they melt down, but will harden again after cooling. Instead of using cement, Milla's project mixes sand and liquid plastics to produce a paste that is forced into a mould and allowed to cool down. The product is a hard cobblestone that can be used for paving sidewalks.

It is a technique that requires no heavy investment and can be done by anyone without much training.

Cobblestones are in high demand across the country, where construction is considered one of the fastest growing sectors.

Beyond the potential of turning such an idea into a profitable business are far-reaching

environmental benefits that touch on sectors like agriculture and livestock production.

## What You Can Do

Begin a public conversation on plastic waste management in your community.

- In a live interactive broadcast, discuss the merits and demerits of plastics and how they are handled in the community.
- Make the connection between poor management of plastic waste and agricultural or livestock production, using local realities.
- Explore other problems related to plastics wastes such as flooding and how that affects people directly or indirectly.
- Identify specific problems and discuss innovative solutions, using local examples or distant experiences that can be easily adopted – such as the production of cobblestones.
- Engage and interview key stakeholders: users, traders, regulators, NGO

### Useful links

Cobblestones from plastics:

<http://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-cobblestones-from-plastic-bags/a-18820924>

Cameroon Tribune report on Eco Collect plastics waste recycling project: <http://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-cobblestones-from-plastic-bags/a-18820924>

More about plastics recycling:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic\\_recycling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic_recycling)

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