



# The Lagos State Government Ban on Single-Use Plastics: Pros and Cons

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## Introduction

Plastic pollution has been a global challenge and a major subject of discussion among national and international organisations<sup>1</sup>. It has amplified the crises of solid waste management, biodiversity loss, and climate change, with significant effects on natural habitats and processes. One result is the reduction in the ability of natural and ecological systems to adjust to the effects of climate change. These affects threaten the livelihood of millions, especially those in local and indigent communities within the corridors of marine and coastal habitats. Undoubtedly, plastics remain an important economic good used across various industries in Nigeria both for the packaging of products and the preservation of consumable articles and by-products. However, the negative impacts of the indiscriminate disposal of single-use plastic on both humans and the environment far outweigh the economic benefits. Data released by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) placing Nigeria 9<sup>th</sup> on the global ranking of top plastic polluting countries in the world<sup>2</sup>. This is further supported by the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) report that Lagos generates 870,000 tonnes of plastic waste annually, accounting for roughly 15% of the total waste produced in the state<sup>3</sup>. This plastic, often single-use, litters the streets, disrupts waterways, and chokes the city's drainage systems, posing a significant threat to the environment and public health. As a result, it imposes an enormous strain on the state's limited resources in attempts to manage wastes.

Data released by UNEP placing Nigeria **9<sup>th</sup>** on the global ranking to top plastic pollution countries in the world.

LAWMA report that Lagos generate **870,000** tonnes of plastic waste annually, accounting for roughly **15%** of the total waste produced in the state

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the Lagos State government has taken significant steps to control the consumption of single-use plastic and to address waste mismanagement in the state by imposing a ban on the consumption of single-use plastics. This policy brief examines the potential effects of this ban and makes striking recommendations on the recent action of the Lagos state Ministry of Environment and Water Resources on the usage of single-use plastic in the State.

<sup>1</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (2023). Daily report for 13 November 2023. Earth Negotiations Bulletin. <https://enb.iisd.org/plastic-pollution-marine-environment-negotiating-committee-inc3-daily-report-13nov2023>

<sup>2</sup> World Environment Day (2023). HADA Resource Center article on plastic pollution by Cecilia Ogwuche. <https://hedang.org/world-environment-day-2023-beat-plastic-pollution/>

<sup>3</sup> Onozure Dania (2022). Plastic waste generation in Lagos State, Punch. <https://punchng.com/lagos-generates-870000-tonnes-of-plastic-waste-yearly-firm/>

## The Ban on Single-Use Plastics in Lagos Nigeria: Pros and Cons

The Lagos State Government's ban on the use of single-use plastic in the state aligns with a global patchwork of agreements as well as national and international initiatives on plastic waste regulation. These include the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) Resolution on Marine Litter and Microplastics (2017)<sup>4</sup> and the European Union Single-Use Plastics Directive (2019)<sup>5</sup> which prevent and reduce the impact of certain plastic products on the environment and human health. The policy also aligns with global actions from other Africa countries such as Rwanda and Kenya in restricting the production of single-use plastics, which has positioned them for sustainable development. Following the restriction on the manufacturing, importation, and sales of single-use plastics by the Government of Rwanda in 2019, the country has become the cleanest in Africa, which has led to increased investment in environmental sustainability and green technologies. This effect can be replicated in Nigeria following the Lagos State Government's decision to ban single-use plastics in the state.



In 2020, the Lagos state government had realised a policy implementation guideline on plastic waste management as part of the Lagos State Development Programme (LSDP)<sup>6</sup> to ensure a sustainable management of plastic waste in Lagos. Notwithstanding this guideline, plastic waste still constitutes a significant portion of solid waste pollution in the state and has attracted concern from different environmental agencies working on achieving sustainable development objectives within the state. Consequently, the Lagos State Ministry of Environment and Waste Resources issued an urgent ban on the indiscriminate use of single use plastic in the state. This is due to the increasingly devastating environmental crises in Lagos occasioned by plastic pollution. As the

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Frame on Plastics and Marine litter (2016). Plastic and Microplastics in our Oceans – A Serious Environmental Threat.

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/plastic-and-microplastics-our-oceans-serious-environmental-threat>

<sup>5</sup> The European Union Directive on Single-Use Plastics (2019). Directive (eu) 2019/904 of the European parliament and of the council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eudr/2019/904#:~:text=The%20objectives%20of%20this%20Directive,products%20and%20materials%2C%20thus%20also>

<sup>6</sup> The Lagos State Waste management guideline (2020). Press release.

<https://moelagos.gov.ng/lagos-to-implement-policy-guidelines-on-plastic-waste-management/>

industrial hub of Nigeria, and one of the most populated states, Lagos is reported to be the largest contributor to the 5.96 million tonnes of annual plastic pollution in Nigeria. Hence, the state government ban on single-use plastic reflects the need to shift to a more sustainable waste management culture and a circular economic model that bonds environmental sustainability.

In terms of benefits, the ban on single-use plastic promises to have positive impacts on industrial activities in the state. This would lead to production innovation that would drive positive economic competition and promote economic growth in the long run through the development and integration of eco-design structures in production processes and recycling. This implies that while the policy has negative short-run economic consequences, there are expected long-run benefits that would result from the policy on companies and value chain actors operating within these industries. Hence, to maximise the ultimate benefit of the policy on the state, the government has to set in place concrete measures that would mitigate short run losses while maximising the possibilities of long run economic benefits by reinforcing positive economic competition and innovation in the design of new production processes and supply-chains structures which requires investment in research and development as well as skills training that would lead to the creation of new jobs.

The ban will also have environmental benefits, as plastic pollution has altered natural processes in the state and reduced ecosystems' ability to adapt to climate change, directly affecting livelihoods and public health outcomes. The state government policy on single-use plastics could help the state go through a process of clean recovery and restore natural processes in the state. The ban also promises cleaner streets, healthier waterways, and a safer habitat for wildlife. Clogged drains from plastic debris are a major cause of Lagos' frequent floods. The ban on single-use plastics would alleviate this, mitigate flood risks and protect lives and property. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and The National Geo-graphics, overflowing landfills, and plastic entering waterways harm the environment and its ecological composition. This is true of Lagos state, hence the ban on single-use plastic would combat these issues and restore public health in the state. Consequently, as part of the potential long-run benefits, the ban would open the state's economy to investment opportunities from environmentally sustainable organisations and innovative hubs that are willing to take advantage of investment opportunities within the circular economy to develop sustainable solutions and products that support environmentally friendly-actions in the state.

However, it is worth noting that the ban comes with a number of policy implications and consequences which, on the one hand, is necessary for ecosystem preservation, while on the other hand would be problematic to the state economy. This is owing to the possible effects on production and supply chains, design structures, standard of living and consumption patterns of various stakeholders on the demand and supply sides of the plastics economy in Lagos state.

Apart from the manufacturers of these plastics, several industries, sectors and sub-sectors in Lagos state rely heavily on single-use plastic for the packaging and distribution of finished and semi-finished products. Hence the ban will not only affect industrial workers but the ripple effect will extend to countless small-scale entrepreneurs, distributors and retailers who depend on plastic production for their livelihood. Additionally, the ban will have enormous consequences on employment for Lagocians as revenue growth and bottom line of businesses contract, as they are forced to find alternative business lines or invest in costly infrastructure to comply with the regulation. This additional expenditure and compulsory transition coupled with the already challenging business environment would have short run consequences that impede economic development outcome in the state.

To mitigate this endemic consequence on the state economy, the Lagos state Government should consider alternative implementation measures such as a stepwise or incremental implementation process for implementing the ban. This process would require unfolding the ban in different phases, thereby allowing businesses and workers sufficient time to adapt to the changes. By doing so, businesses would develop more sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives for packaging of consumable articles which are reusable or biodegradable. This would also provide sufficient time for consumer education on proper use and disposal culture. Furthermore, a stepwise implementation would allow the state government enforcement agency to monitor the transition closely, gathering feedback from affected industries and making adjustments to the implementation strategy as needed.

Besides the hit to employment, decline in business growth, and supply chain disruption, the indirect effects of the ban on the prices on goods and services due to new packaging technology and design is an important aspect demanding careful consideration. As the ban is imposed, this would lead to the transfer of the cost burden on consumers, as end-users would be forced to pay higher prices for the goods and services, which would further heighten economic hardship far above present economic realities.

Given this fact, it becomes necessary for the government to consider better ways of mitigating the possible price burden associated with increased cost of upgraded designed plastics infrastructure through cost sharing between the demand and supply side of the distribution chain. The Lagos State Government can support this through regulation of the supply chain, partnership with manufacturers and affected industries, antitrust policies, price controls and the issuance of green bonds to support investment in research and development. Undertaking one or more of these approaches would help mitigate the looming consequences occasioned by transferred transitioning and development cost on the end users. Additionally, consideration should be given to the multiplier effect of the ban on other states in Nigeria. The price-effect of the ban on single-use plastic is expected to have a ripple effect on other states in Nigeria thereby

impacting cost of living for Nigerians generally. This is owing to the fact that Lagos state stands central to Nigeria's industrial activities, accounting for approximately 54% of manufacturing activities in Nigeria.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

The effective implementation of the ban requires a multifaceted approach. Public engagement and awareness campaigns are crucial to garner support and encourage the adoption of eco-friendly alternatives. Strict enforcement measures are necessary to ensure compliance. Improving waste management infrastructure, including recycling facilities, will be pivotal in handling the transition away from single-use plastics to circular initiatives.

Some important policy recommendations for the Lagos State Government include:

1. A stepwise approach to the implementation of the policy on single-use plastic is highly recommended as this would provide sufficient time for manufacturers to rethink alternative measures and redesign supply chain and production process. This would minimise the short run consequences of the policy while maximising long-run positive economic and environmental benefit.
2. There should also be incentives and support for businesses and individuals who adopt eco-friendly practices, as well as penalties and sanctions for those who violate the rules. Furthermore, there should be continuous monitoring and evaluation of the policy outcomes and impacts, as well as feedback mechanisms to allow for adjustments and improvements.
3. To address the diverse concerns and interests of stakeholders affected by the ban, the Lagos State Government should establish structured consultation mechanisms. These mechanisms should involve representatives from industries, manufacturers, retailers, environmental organisations, and community groups to collaboratively develop and refine the implementation strategy.
4. Alongside the implementation of the ban, the Lagos State Government should invest in comprehensive public awareness and education campaigns to inform residents, businesses, and consumers about the environmental impacts of single-use plastics and the importance of transitioning to sustainable alternatives.

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<sup>7</sup> Lagos Informal Sector Taxation and contribution to Economy(2017). Heinrich Böll Stiftung, BudgetIT. [https://ng.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2017/02/budgetit\\_final\\_report\\_30.1.17.pdf](https://ng.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2017/02/budgetit_final_report_30.1.17.pdf)