

Plastic bag bans are spreading. But are they truly effective?

Kenya has the strictest penalties for bag use, but the consumer alternatives to plastic have come with growing pains.

BY LAURA PARKER

NAKURU, KENYA. In the open-air Wakulima Market thin plastic shopping bags have disappeared, banished by Kenya’s national bag ban. Produce sellers in this busy agricultural center 95 miles northwest of Nairobi now pack perishable food in thicker bags made of synthetic fabric. As James Wakibia, thinks about the irony: Plastic bags replaced by plastic bags. He is the 36-year-old face of the social media campaign that prompted the ban in 2017 and says an imperfect ban is better than none. “The UN says that Kenyans were using 100 million bags a year by supermarkets alone, so we have saved 100 million bags. I would evaluate success at 80 percent.” Said James Wakibia. Often described as the world’s number one consumer product, as well as the most ubiquitous, shopping bags are now among the world’s most-banned. As of last July, the United Nations counted 127 nations that have banned or taxed bags—and bag regulations have reproduced so quickly, especially at the local level, that even an Al Qaeda-backed terrorist group joined in—banning plastic shopping bags last summer as it is “a serious threat to the well-being of humans and animals alike.” Yet as bag bans spread around the globe, their effectiveness remains an unanswered question. Bag bans have spawned bans of other plastic products, including plates, cups, cutlery, straws and bottles, as part of an expanding effort to reduce single-use plastics, which make up about 40 percent of the plastics manufactured worldwide. But whether bans can significantly reduce plastic waste, which leaks into the oceans at an average	Perishable: Decomposable Prompt: help Ubiquitous: universal Joined in: participate Spread: Expand Spawn: Generate Leak: escape
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rate of 8 million tons a year, remains to be seen—especially when considering that plastic production is forecast to double by 2040, and may account for 20 percent of the world’s oil production by 2050.	
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I. Comprehension questions: Choose the correct option for each question

1) What is considered the world’s number one consumer product?

- a. Paper bags
- b. Plastic bags
- c. Glass cutlery

2) How many countries have banned/regulated plastic bags?

- a. 36
- b. 100 million
- c. 127

3) Why do you think that the terrorist group Al-Qaeda was mentioned?

- a. Because they are not important
- b. Because even people you consider morally and ethically incorrect, do something about plastic contamination.
- c. Because they like plastic bags.

4) Are only plastic bags being banned?

- a. Yes
- b. No

II. True or False.

- a. According to the author, plastic bags were replaced by plastic bags.
- b. Kenya’s new regulations on plastic bags are rated with 50% success.
- c. Plastic bags are now considered one of the world’s most banned.

III. Grammar point

1) Look at the text and then write all the present perfect verbs on the table.

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