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The comparative political economy of plastic bag bans in East Africa: why implementation has varied in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda

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Abstract:

The environmental damage that plastic waste is causing has catalysed government action against plastic bags around the world. Despite anti-plastic bag policies gaining traction globally, there has been limited investigation of how the implementation of bans has varied. This paper is the first to comparatively examine why there has been variation in implementing bans on plastic bags, using the examples of three East African countries: Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda. Explanations of why anti-plastic bag policies have been blocked in other countries usually rely on business power-based explanations, with the assumption that plastic manufacturers (and the broader manufacturing sector) have obstructed implementation. The comparatively limited strength and size of plastic manufacturers in Rwanda, as compared to Kenya and Uganda, suggests that business power may partly explain why the ban in Rwanda has been implemented. However, business power-based arguments do not explain the variation between implementation in Kenya and Uganda. In both countries, anti-plastic bag actions have been announced repeatedly but implementation has stuttered, with commitment to implementation stronger and less contested in Kenya than in Uganda. Criticisms of the existing business power literature tend to be weak on examining why governments may go ahead with policies that are against the interests of businesses. This paper argues that developing country government's ecological modernisation initiatives may be shaped by pressures from three levels – business power, the local environment and the external environment – to explain why implementation of plastic bag bans has varied in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda.

Keywords

Plastic, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, business power, structural power, instrumental power, plastic bags, East Africa, comparative politics

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the negative effects that plastic waste has on marine life and the broader environment. Yet large amounts of plastic continue to be produced. According to one study, 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic have been produced globally, with around half that amount produced since 2004 (Geyer et al, 2017). The same study (Geyer et al, 2017) estimates that only 9% of that plastic has been recycled, with 12% incinerated and 79% in landfill, while one-third of global plastic waste is not collected at all (Stahel, 2016). Although there are different estimates of the scale of plastic waste, plastic forms a large share of the world's litter (roughly 60–80%) and it remains difficult to clean up (Derraik, 2002). A large share of plastic waste ends up in the world's oceans. For example, in 2010, it is estimated that 275 million metric tonnes of plastic waste was generated in 192 coastal countries, out of which, 4.8–12.7 million metric tonnes entered the ocean (Jambeck et al, 2015). International press and television has increasingly focused on the visible negative effects plastic waste has had on marine ecosystems and public attention is increasingly being drawn to the problem. In June 2018, reports that a whale had died in southern Thailand after ingesting more than 80 plastic bags gained global attention (Zachos, 2018). The surge in global attention has had immediate effects, with the European Union responding by banning a range of single-use plastics, and one Member of the European Parliament claiming that, if no action was taken, "by 2050, there would be more plastic than fish in the oceans" (BBC, 2018).

The term 'plastics' (synthetic polymers) broadly includes five main commodity plastics: polypropylene, polyethylene, polyvinyl chloride, polystyrene and polyethylene terephthalate (Andrady and Neal, 2009). The production of plastics has a long history, dating back to 1600 BC (Hosier et al, 1999) but the first industrial-scale production of plastics took place in the 1940s (Al-Salem et al, 2009).[1] Plastic waste is often distinguished on the basis of its size (in diameter), including microplastics (smaller than 5 mm, or than 1 mm in some studies) and macroplastics (larger than 5 mm).[2] Plastic bags usually fall within the macroplastics category. Plastic bags takes up to 1000 years to break down and they photodegrade (rather than biodegrade), meaning that they break down into smaller and smaller pieces.

More than a third of plastics consumption is of plastic bags (Andrady and Neal, 2009). Since plastics are lightweight, strong, durable and cheap (Derraik, 2002), they are also widely used in manufacturing a range of products, including pipes, footwear, fabrics, public health equipment and furniture. The manufacture of plastic bags was initially

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[1] See Andrady and Neal (2009) for a discussion of the history of plastics production. Others like Gorman (1993) argue that plastics, as pure synthetic organic polymers, have only existed for just over a century.

[2] See Xanthos and Walker (2017) for a discussion of the negative effects that waste from microplastics has on the environment.

promoted by the US oil and gas industry in the 1970s, since high-density polyethylene – the chief material for single-use, thin-film bags – is primarily made out of fossil fuels. According to one report, 12 million barrels of oil are required to produce 100 billion plastic bags annually; thus the continued use of plastic bags has implications for fossil fuel supplies and climate change. Initially, plastic bags competed with paper bags in the 1970s but their use gradually became ubiquitous around the world because of the diverse uses of polyethylene, particularly in manufacturing and retail (Clapp and Swanston, 2009; Wagner, 2017).

Plastic bag waste has several negative effects on the environment from contributing to unsightly litter to putting public safety at risk (as a breeding ground for malaria-carrying mosquitoes and by clogging sewers and drains) to posing threats to wildlife. Public recognition of the damage that plastic bags cause began in Europe. In the early 1990s, Germany and Denmark applied taxes against the use of plastic bags. In the developing world, similar attitudes took hold at the same time. In India, anti-plastic bag sentiment surfaced in the 1990s and laws were passed in several states and cities to restrict their use (Edwards and Kellett, 2000). They were perceived to be a key factor in landslides and floods, as well as posing a health threat to free-roaming sacred cows, which would eat discarded bags along with other garbage in the streets (Clapp and Swanston, 2009). In Bangladesh, campaigns against plastic shopping bags began in the early 1990s, led by local environmental NGOs and then taken up by the Ministry of Environment (Reazuddin, 2006). In 2007, Bangladesh banned all polythene bags after discovering that they were clogging the country's drainage system and contributing to exacerbating the floods of 1988–89 and to the spread of water-borne diseases (Ritch et al, 2009). Later, the widely-lauded plastic bag environmental levy was introduced in the Republic of Ireland, with non-exempt bags costing shoppers 15 cents each. The use of plastic bags was cut by more than 90% – removing more than one billion plastic bags from circulation each year, with the ban proving so popular that it would have been politically damaging to remove it (Convey et al, 2007; Dobson, 2007).

Scholarship (Clapp and Swanston, 2009; Knoblauch et al, 2018) has suggested that the anti-plastic bag norm appears to have flowed from South to North, in contrast to the assumptions of the ecological modernisation literature (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000; Mol, 2002; Weidner, 2002). Developing countries have also taken more stringent action than advanced countries. Knoblauch et al (2018) show that 36 out of 51 countries that have adopted plastic bag bans were in the Global South, while 28 of 39 countries that only retained taxes on plastic bags were in the Global North.[3] Although the ecological modernisation literature has explicitly argued for the importance of states in driving environmental policies and governance, African states are understood to be incapable of enacting environmental policies, either because their governments are too weak or be-

[3] Knoblauch et al (2018) apply the term 'Global South' to countries listed as eligible for official development assistance, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 'Global North' is used as a term for countries outside that list.

cause they are concerned with more pressing concerns to uplift their economies (Death, 2016). The fact that developing countries (many of which are in Africa) have chosen to adopt stricter anti-plastic bag legislation, as compared to advanced countries, should force ecological modernisation scholars to re-think the role of the state in enacting environmental policy.

Although Clapp and Swanston (2009) consider the spread of anti-plastic bag policies to be a norm, the variation in implementation across developing countries may indicate that anti-plastic bag norms are more a signal of symbolic government action than of widespread consensus on the applicability of such policies. Existing studies tend to assume that, if plastic bag actions were announced, governments implemented them. Clearly, even where implementation has been considered successful, as in Rwanda, there is considerable evidence of smuggling and the illicit use of plastic bags. However, in other countries, where actions against plastic bags have been announced, there has been public recognition that no action has been taken. The study of variation in the implementation of plastic bag bans provides an opportunity to contribute to the ecological modernisation literature, showing how different developing country governments may enact environmental policies in varied domestic political economies.

This paper makes a unique contribution by examining why the implementation of plastic bag bans has varied across three different countries: Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda. Existing literature (Clapp and Swanston, 2009; Njeru, 2006) on anti-plastic bag legislation suggests that governments have wavered in enacting anti-plastic bag policies because of the structural power of domestic plastic industries. The literature does not elaborate on the definition of structural power beyond a minimalist definition. Clapp and Swanston (2009, p 324), for example, refer to structural power “in the form of job provision and its contribution to the overall manufacturing economy”. Instead, this paper adopts the broader definition of business power, which encompasses both structural power and instrumental power. Instrumental power comprises the different ways in which business influences politics (outside the core functions of firms): campaign donations, membership associations, lobbying activities and privileged access to policy makers (Culpepper, 2011; Culpepper and Reinke, 2014). Structural power, in contrast, refers to the pressure that firms apply through their investment decisions. Since governments rely on firm investment to sustain growth, policies that go against the interests of firms may encourage firms to disinvest.

Collectively, these two dimensions of business power explain the effectiveness of Rwanda’s plastic bag ban (where the plastics industry was virtually non-existent) in comparison to Kenya and Uganda (where the plastics industries were much more organised). However, business power-based explanations do not fully explain why implementation of the ban has varied between Kenya and Uganda. Business power-based explanations, which tend to conflate structural power with instrumental power, have been criticised as being unable to account for why governments implement anti-business policies where structural power is salient. New literature (Bell, 2012) has focused its attention on how government action may be shaped through pressures in addition to business power. Building on this literature, the paper highlights how environmental policy is being shaped in dealing with multiple pressures from local, industrial (including structural power) and external levels.

The paper begins with a discussion of the literature on business power, arguing for a more focused discussion about how the agency of governments may be shaped by other pressures, categorised in the paper as local and external pressures. It then develops a comparative analysis of how such pressures have shaped government action in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda, while illustrating how plastic bag policies developed over time in the three countries. The paper concludes by arguing that the ecological modernisation literature should play closer attention to the role of African governments in implementing environmental policies. When doing so, however, we should aim to develop a broader understanding of how business power and other multi-scalar pressures contribute to variation in the implementation of policies.

2. Business power against environmental policy

The question of how policies may be obstructed or influenced by businesses has been explained as resulting from two sources of business power: structural power and instrumental power. In the 1970s, the structural power of business was widely discussed in Marxist and pluralist circles, with eminent scholars including Ralph Miliband (1973), Fred Block (1977) and Charles Lindblom (1977) emphasising the influence that businesses had on government policies shaping the direction of capitalism. In the classical argument, businesses had structural power because governments and the wider society depend on their investments to sustain the economy, while they also provide employment and tax revenues. Hence, governments needed to manage the structural power of businesses because of an 'investment imperative' (Block, 1987; Lindblom, 1977), whereby governments needed investment from businesses to finance the country's economic activity to an extent that allowed ruling parties or politicians to remain in power. Specifically, politicians anticipated scenarios where enacting certain policies would result in businesses – whose profits were threatened by the implementation of those policies – withdrawing their investment. Thus structural power 'arises from a perceived disinvestment threat' (Fairfield, 2010, p 40).

Over time, the concept of structural power was extended across domestic boundaries, with the international political economy literature (including the work of Susan Strange), deploying it to understand how transnational finance and capital influenced transnational politics.[4] For example, Strange (1988) showed how in the face of the US's hegemonic decline, the transnational empire of its power remained because of the reach of US finance, businesses and their networks.

[4] See Guzzini (1993) for a critical review of the ways in which structural power has been used within the international political economy literature.

While the usage of structural power flourished, criticisms abounded. Scholars (Vogel, 1987; Culpepper, 2015) noted that segments of the political science and international relations literature rejected the material emphasis of structural power-based arguments, instead arguing that the businesses were similar to any other group, winning some conflicts and losing others. After the 1980s, some argue that studies of structural power fell out of fashion (Fuchs, 2005; Culpepper, 2011), given that structural power-based arguments had limited explanatory power. Segments of the international political economy literature assumed that structural power had only been important in a few large states, particularly the US, whose central role in the international system meant they could exercise influence over foreign state and non-state actors (Strange, 1996).

Differentiating between structural power and instrumental power influences how we conceive of policy recommendations to tackle challenges imposed by business power. Instrumental power refers to a more active form of political action than structural power. Instrumental power includes lobbying, the use of political connections and the financing of political parties – both by business associations and by individual firms. If instrumental power is more influential in obstructing policies aimed at achieving public goods then some attention should be dedicated to challenging lobbying or political finance. However, if the structural positions of businesses are perceived to be more influential, then policies should be directed at limiting the size and concentration of companies within an economy (Culpepper, 2015). In fact, structural power and instrumental power are interrelated in numerous ways. For example, lobbying can augment the impression that reforms may cause disinvestment, thereby increasing structural power (Fairfield, 2010).

The study of structural power has become increasingly popular recently, particularly after the global financial crisis. Studies have examined the problems of 'too big to fail' banks and the post-crisis strength of the state in relation to large financial institutions, domestically and internationally (Culpepper, 2015).[5] But in studies that have tended notionally to refer to structural power – particularly in relation to its influence on environmental policy (Clapp and Swanston, 2009) – there has been a tendency to subsume 'instrumental power' within a broader definition of structural power. Thus, in its popular usage, 'structural power' has become a catch-all term to describe the ways in which businesses have influenced policy making.

Yet the study of business power remains concentrated in the study of advanced countries. There are important exceptions, including influential studies on Asian and Latin American countries (Winters, 1996; Fairfield, 2015). The concept of 'business power' or its composites – structural and instrumental power – is rarely used to study business power in African countries. One recent exception is Florence Dafe's (2019) study of the structural power of capital in Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda and the associated effects on central bank policies in those countries. The limited application of the concept of struc-

[5] Examples of such studies include Culpepper and Reinke (2014), Bell and Hindmoor (2015, 2017), Fichtner (2017) and Emmenegger (2015).

tural power to African countries is not surprising, given that African capitalists and capitalist classes have been under-examined since the popularity of research around the Kenya debate of the 1970s (Leys, 1978; Kaplinsky, 1980). Since then, most studies that have examined state–business relations or capitalist classes have taken a pessimistic tone with regard to the status of African capitalists, arguing that their productive potential was limited or that there was little evidence of powerful capitalist classes (Boone, 1992; Handley, 2008). Rather than the power of capitalist classes influencing policy shifts, the African studies literature highlighted several examples of how ruling classes obstructed the growth of local businesses (Tangri, 1998). However, even in the 1990s, there were suggestions that business power actually varied significantly across African countries (Wilson, 1990). Influential work has highlighted how instrumental power has been prevalent across African countries, with opposition victories in elections in several countries being funded by local businesses there (Arriola, 2013). Evidence that business associations have been effective in shaping government policy (Brautigam et al, 2002) also suggests the importance of instrumental power in the region.

Since domestic businesses may actually have more strength than is assumed by pessimistic strands of the African studies literature, there is reason to focus on how business power may influence policy making. However, business power arguments tend to assume business supremacy in policy making, which does not even seem to be the case in advanced countries (Bell, 2012). This is especially true since businesses often fail to influence policy (even in advanced countries) (Culpepper, 2015). Bell (2012, p 662) argues that structuralist accounts are deficient in their limited focus on government agency and that a focus on such agency is warranted given that “it is governments and state leaders who must confront, interpret and react to business pressures”. Although Bell (2012) focuses on the role of ideas in contributing to shaping government policy, this paper focuses on how the enactment of environmental policy in developing countries is mediated by different pressures: business power, local and external pressures.

Government implementation of plastic bag bans varies across Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda as it encounters the business power of plastics companies and the broader manufacturing sector. This requires an examination of how environmental policy is influenced by competing pressures. The next section discusses the factors that determine how structural power and environmental norms compete to influence government action.

3. The comparative political economy of ecological modernisation

Implementing environmental policy has often been perceived to be at the cost of the economy, particularly manufacturing. The historical reliance of the manufacturing sector on fossil-fuel based energy and the associated environmental hazards that have accompanied manufacturing-based development strategies has meant that industrialisation is often presented as directly opposed to environmental policies. Such ‘growth versus environment' logics have been prominent since *The Limits to Growth* report (Meadows et al, 1972) and the de-growth literature that consequently proliferated.[6] This literature argues for the downscaling of production and consumption, suggesting that overconsumption is at the root of environmental issues and social inequalities. In contrast, the ecological modernisation literature (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000) has argued that economic growth can be reconciled with sustainable development through gradual reforms. Additionally, this literature has argued that the role of the state and of policy interventions is central to understanding how environmental objectives may be met (Buttel, 2000; Murphy and Gouldson, 2000). Within North America, Europe and later, East Asia, ecological modernisation's emphasis on the role of the state resonated with the new 'green' strategies being adopted across the world (Dent, 2014).

However, ecological modernisation has long been silent on the possibilities of state intervention for environmental policy in Sub-Saharan Africa (Death, 2016). There has been even less engagement with how African governments' motivations to enact industrial policy may be influenced by broader domestic societal pressures and the positions of external actors. Some literature (Clapp and Swanston, 2009) – aligned with ecological modernisation – has shown that structural power is a factor that has influenced the uptake of environmental policy, directly in relation to anti-plastic bag policies. Others (Knoblauch et al, 2018), without using the term ' instrumental power', have suggested that industry lobby groups and domestic plastics industries have blocked anti-plastic bag legislation (Knoblauch et al, 2018).

Ecological modernisation theory notes that economic growth and production may be compatible with sustainable transformation. Banning and imposing tariffs on the use and production of plastic bags also creates new markets. Thus, where accumulation may be obstructed in one sector, it creates the opportunity for the government and firms to organise new arenas for profit. One obvious new market is a market for substitutes like paper bags and cloth bags. But in order for substitute economies to prosper, there must be legislation to protect the production of substitutes. The Rwandan, Kenyan and Ugandan governments have all encouraged the promotion of substitute economies. However, even Rwanda – the most advanced country in the region in implementing the ban on plastic bags – has had limited success with the growth of substitute economies. The Rwandan paper bag industry has to compete against imported paper bags, produced by firms in neighbouring countries, which enjoy tariff-free access to the country. As part of the East African Community Customs Union, the Rwandan government could list paper bags as a special item to be protected but the government has not chosen to protect the industry. Rwanda's domestic paper bag industry also has to compete against smuggled plastic bags that continue to enter the country. Thus, the growth of substitute economies is reliant on government protection and support, without which no substitute economies are likely to grow. For Rwanda – where local plastic bag manufacturing was almost non-existent – a ban could have provided the possibility

[6] See Martinez-Alier et al (2010) for a review of the de-growth literature.

of gaining advantages in manufacturing substitutes. However, such advantages have not been realised and strategic industrial policy has not been developed to support such industries (in line with the government's overall neglect of the manufacturing sector) (Behuria and Goodfellow, 2019).

East African governments have also focused their attention on supporting plastic recycling. This is in line with supporting the growth of a 'circular economy' (Stahel and Reday-Mulvey, 1981). Initial investments and significant research have begun to be conducted on supporting the growth of circular economies in China, Europe and the US (Ghisellini et al, 2015). But, although African governments – and other developing countries – may adopt rhetoric in line with establishing circular economies, significant investment is required for such rhetoric to translate to policy. East African governments have all discussed support for plastic recycling alongside discussions of banning plastic bags. Yet plastics recycling could easily occur alongside plastic bag production and even benefit from the increased production of the latter (although a share of plastic waste is inevitably contaminated since it cannot be recycled).

This paper is contributing to the ecological modernisation literature by showing how the agency of governments in implementing environmental policy (and, in this case, action against plastic bags) is mediated by pressures of three kinds. The first is *business power*, where existing plastic bag manufacturers, their associations and local manufacturing groups (because plastic packaging is required for a large share of manufactured products) form pressure groups, since they provide investment and employment while also paying taxes to the government. Business power has two forms – structural power and instrumental power. Anti-plastic bag action negatively affects the growth of manufacturing companies, which may negatively affect employment potential within the sector. Governments in all three countries have lagged behind in job creation and the difficulties in creating employment are becoming increasingly salient, given that the majority of the population is either younger than or of working age. Since manufacturing (and plastics manufacturing) provided a potential source of employment, it would make sense that the structural power of businesses in the sector would be significant. Additionally, plastic bag manufacturing is part of the activities of some the largest diversified business groups (DBGs) in Kenya and Uganda. For some, plastic bag manufacturing provided a source of diversification to other activities – either through revenue gained from success in plastics manufacturing or through developing organisational capacity within the business.

The second set of pressures is *local*. Initially, scholarship argued that the anti-plastic bag norm "emerged primarily for locally specific reasons and was largely a bottom-up simultaneous occurrence" (Clapp and Swanston, 2009, p 321). The strength of local movements was not salient in all three cases. Only in Kenya has local civil society been consistently engaged in calling for anti-plastic bag policies. Nobel Prize Winner Wangari Maathai's personal engagement and activism around the issue strengthened their position. In Kenya especially, but also in the other countries, the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) promotion of the anti-plastic bag norm has also motivated action (Clapp and Swanston, 2009).

The third set of pressures is *external*. The anti-plastic norm appears to have diffused simultaneously in the North and South or, according to some, has diffused from South to North (Clapp and Swanston, 2009). The norm has now achieved the status of a 'cascade' (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) and is now a signal of environmental best practice, with multiple countries having rapidly adopted anti-plastic bag action. Since developing countries have tended to take stricter action, many of them have been interpreted to be ahead of the curve. Yet Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda do not have a historical responsibility to lower emissions and do not generate significant emissions currently. Thus, since civil society groups have not been significantly involved in anti-plastic bag activism in any of these countries, the positions (regardless of implementation) of these governments are puzzling. The structural power of businesses may have slowed implementation in Kenya and Uganda but, in Rwanda, business power was marginal. However, in Rwanda, action against plastic bags worked closely in line with the government's services-based development strategy, which was dependent on tourism and building Kigali into a 'model' city – based on the model of Singapore – to attract investment to a safe and modern destination in East and Central Africa (Goodfellow, 2014). Within the government's strategy – VISION 2020 – service sectors like tourism were prioritised above manufacturing and the government's adoption of a plastic bags ban was an indication of this. In Kenya, UNEP's presence in Nairobi was also salient. However, in Uganda, the government's development strategy has never prioritised making Kampala into a hub in the same way the Rwandan and Kenyan governments see their capital cities. Museveni's government has placed much more emphasis on managing the region's geopolitics as a way to gain policy autonomy through diplomatic relationships with external actors (Fisher, 2012) than on gaining international legitimacy through abiding by or leading environmental norms.

Another significant external pressure to implement plastic bag bans has emerged regionally, where the East African Community (EAC) – which comprises Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and South Sudan – has become an avenue through which implementation has been encouraged. In 2011, Rwandan Member of Parliament Patricia Hajabakiga proposed The EAC Polythene Materials Control Bill, which was passed by the EAC regional parliament. However, it was not signed into law after Kenya refused to assent and called for a review. At different stages, other countries (Uganda and Tanzania) have acted as spoilers to the bill. Eventually, in 2017, the East African Legislative Assembly passed the EAC Polythene Materials Control Bill, aiming to prohibit the manufacturing, sale, importation and use of polythene materials. Pressure from within the EAC (and the persistence of the Rwandan government) have motivated discussions across the region, showing how regional institutions are becoming influential in diffusing environmental norms. For example, one Ugandan ministry of industry official noted that the Rwandan government's "persistent talk of plastic bags at EAC meetings" made the anti-plastic bag policies difficult to ignore.[7]

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[7] Interview, mid-level official, Ugandan Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, April 2018.

The following sections discuss how and why the agency of the Rwandan, Kenyan and Ugandan governments have varied in relation to implementing plastic bag bans with regard to the industrial, local and external pressures that shaped their actions.

4. Rwanda: authoritarian environmentalism against the 'developmental state'

Since the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) ended the genocide and assumed control of the country in 1994, Rwanda has been widely lauded for its impressive economic growth and its impressive performance in improving social indicators, particularly in relation to health (Abbott et al, 2017). Critics of Rwanda have been particularly scathing of the authoritarian 'high-modernist' (Scott, 1998) elements of the country's top-down policy making, which they argue leaves little room for dialogue with citizens (Newbury, 2011; Dye, 2016; Huggins, 2017). Rwanda's plastic bag ban, at least on the surface, points to a clear alignment with high-modernist narratives, often used to criticise the country's policy making.

Discussions of taking action against plastic bags began in 2003 after a study (Kabenga and Musabe, 2003), funded by the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA), highlighted the negative impact that plastic waste was having on the environment. The study focused on damage that plastic waste has caused in the form of litter, polluting the soil, blocking drainage systems and the dangers it posed to cows. The 2003 study and others before it provided some evidence of local discussions about anti-plastic bag action and the Rwandan government responded by initiating nation-wide campaigns to increase awareness about the issue in 2004.[8] However, there is no evidence of pressure from local actors outside the government. Taking leadership in environmental action was closely linked to the government's VISION 2020 strategy of becoming a knowledge-based economy, based initially on service sector growth. Services-based growth, however, rested on making Kigali a 'hub', to attract external interest (through tourism and investment) (Behuria and Goodfellow, 2019).

In 2005, Rwanda banned the importation and use of plastics less than 100 microns thick. In the same year, UNEP's (2005) report on Kenya's plastic bag problem, which was prompted by renowned Kenyan environmental activist Wangari Maathai, received widespread attention in Africa and UNEP later became a 'norm entrepreneur', promoting action against plastic bags across the continent (Clapp and Swanston, 2009). In 2008, Rwanda's anti-plastic bag action was among the strictest in the continent when it passed a law banning the importation and use of non-biodegradable packaging bags. While the government had initially pursued action with local concerns in mind, external pressures augmented the pace and scale of the action. Government officials said this was because Rwanda aimed to be a "first mover in the region in environmental action", with some arguing that this would result in "innovation and being ahead in new tech-

[8] Interview, local journalist, January 2015.

nologies".[9] Implementation was strict, with smugglers receiving up to six months in jail and government inspectors often embarking on surprise checks of stores and manufacturing plants.[10] Smuggling is nevertheless still rife, with neighbouring countries continuing to produce plastic bags.

The government's rapid action against plastic bags was surprising to many observers, especially to the local plastics manufacturing industry, suggesting the limited structural power of businesses in the sector. Rwanda's Private Sector Federation confirmed this in a position paper where it described the limited adjustment period whereby manufacturers had to end their operations within weeks (Danielsson, 2017). The owner of one plastic manufacturing company (SOIMEX) had recently returned to Rwanda in the 2000s. His family shut down the manufacturing plant during the genocide. To re-start the plant, he had just received a loan from Rwanda's National Development Bank. He said:

> In 2004, everything was set up and a week later, they decided to ban plastic bags. I almost packed up and left. I had most of my life savings in a loan with the bank to re-start the plant.[11]

The ban on plastic bags has negatively affected the production costs of most manufacturing companies. Rwanda's geographical position as a small, land-locked country has meant that there are several impediments to supporting the growth of the manufacturing sector, including very high transport costs. Officially, plastic items that are imported for packaging must be exported and companies must obtain permission from the government. Local manufacturers were threatened that their company's executives could spend up to a year in jail if they used plastic packaging (without permission) in the production and transport of their products.[12] Although the government could provide special dispensation, several manufacturers have emphasised how the sudden announcement of the plastic ban and the continued heavy-handed implementation of it "made no sense for any country trying to pursue manufacturing".[13] The government's implementation of the ban suggests that presenting Kigali as a forward-thinking, environmental leader in the region, in order to attract tourism and foreign support for a services-based development strategy, outweighed supporting the manufacturing sector. This suggests the limited structural and instrumental power of the manufacturing sector. Now the government is aiming to become a plastic free nation and the parliament has

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[9] Interview, Office of the President, Government of Rwanda, May 2013.
[10] Interview, mid-level officials, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) and Rwanda Development Board (RDB), January 2015.
[11] Interview, SOIMEX owner, August 2016.
[12] Interviews, senior management, Rwandan manufacturers, May 2012 and May 2013.
[13] Interviews, senior management, Rwandan manufacturers, October 2011–August 2016.

drafted a law banning single-use plastic materials such as straws and disposable cutlery. Government officials linked the plastic ban, directly to prioritising business tourism:

> Banning plastic has meant that Kigali is now one of the cleanest cities in Africa and the world. This makes us compete with first-world cities and will help us boost tourism, which is already our highest foreign exchange earner.[14]

The government initially stated its intention to retain a focus on industrial priorities; despite enacting the ban on plastic bags, the government was keen to support innovation in new technologies while committing to protecting its environment by banning plastic bags. Death (2015) argues that this was also evident in the Rwandan government's national strategy on Climate Change and Low Carbon Development. There were clearly some characteristics of ecological modernisation-type state-led initiatives in Rwanda (at least, on paper). In the late 2000s, the government committed to providing tax incentives to companies that would help recycle plastic and manufacture environmentally friendly plastic bags. Gahaya Links – a privately owned Rwandan handicraft firm, founded in 2004 – makes hand-woven baskets, which provide an alternative to plastic bags. However, most of its production has been export-oriented. With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Gahaya Links has prioritised developing direct links with US buyers such as Macy's to export to international markets.

Paper bags are more direct substitutes for plastic bags. Two companies invested in local production of paper bags after the plastic bag ban. Locally owned Bonus Industries was established in 2006 as a direct response to the first ban on plastics imposed in 2005. In 2017, Bonus produced 160 tonnes of grocery bags and 60 tonnes of bread packaging material, employing 50 full-time staff and 35 casual labourers (Nkurunziza, 2017). In 2011, Indian-owned SRB Investments became one of the first firms to invest in the Kigali Special Economic Zone. The owner, Rakesh Bhatnagar, was excited by "the potential of the market because of the ban and the possibilities that would come once the region follows with implementing the ban".[15] By 2017, SRB had the largest market share of any locally based company, employed 130 Rwandans but was only running its factory at 25–30% of capacity. The owner was struggling to pay back the company's loans and to compete with imported paper bags and smuggled plastic bags, which were sold at much lower rates. He explained:

> It is tough to compete. For us, the market is small, initial fixed costs are high like constructing the factory and machinery. We are still paying that back. Our competitors in Kenya and Uganda have already paid their costs. Local companies

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[14] Interview, senior official, Rwanda Development Board, August 2016.
[15] Interview, owner, foreign manufacturing company, August 2016.

> can only fight for 30% of the market and the rest is for importers. After harping on for years, they said you don't have to pay VAT on import of raw materials in July 2016. If plastic bags were banned, you'd think we'd be minting money but the government, though good at heart, has not made the right policies. Now, the opportunity is lost.[16]

Manufacturing companies have complained that the government did not provide enough subsidies and support to make the production of alternatives to plastic bags feasible and some have criticised the government for "a lack of vision".[17] This suggests that, although there may have been rhetoric in line with supporting substitute economies, little was done in practice.

Government officials also argued that a plastic bag ban would help support the emergence of a recycling industry and some speak about the aim of making Rwanda a "regional hub for recycling".[18] While clearly a recycling industry could have existed alongside a plastic manufacturing industry, government officials reasoned that new investments in recycling would give Rwanda "an edge against other countries".[19] SOIMEX – which had to end plans to reopen its plastic manufacturing plant – chose to invest in plastic recycling after eventually getting a loan from a South African bank and buying machines in 2012. Given that the company operates in an environment where it competes with four to five other companies, it is forced "to fight for every piece of plastic" in the post-plastic bag ban environment.[20] SOIMEX and other companies turn recycled plastic into a variety of products, including plastic sheets, bottles, trash bags and plastic material used in hospitals. However, companies complain that one local company has an advantage since it has a monopoly in cleaning services and trash collection in the country. The owner of Ecoplastics – the large plastic recycling company – said his success was primarily because he was the "first mover" and he acknowledged his external contacts (a brother who worked in China) and support through funding from UNEP, the Rwandan Development Bank and the World Bank as key ingredients of his success. Ecoplastics now has 20–30% of the market but growth and production are limited by the market size.[21] However, all recycling companies said that they had not received any support or subsidies from the government and one claimed that the lack of attention to recycling companies had been a "missed opportunity", with neighbouring countries likely to become stronger in their implementation of plastic bag bans.[22]

Business power has had little effect on shaping government action. The structural power of businesses has rarely been considered a concern during RPF rule – with par-

[16] Interview, owner, Rwanda-based manufacturer, August 2016.
[17] Interviews, senior managers, Rwandan manufacturers, August 2016.
[18] Interview, mid-ranking official, MINECOFIN, May 2013.
[19] Interview, Office of the President of Rwanda, May 2013.
[20] Interview, manager, Rwandan company, August 2016.
[21] Interview, owner, Rwandan manufacturer, August 2016.
[22] Interview, owner, Kenyan manufacturing company, August 2016.

ty-affiliated companies the most prominent local businesses in the economy (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012; Behuria, 2015, 2016, 2018). The neglect of broader industrial opportunities has also been visible, given that the possibilities to support substitute economies has been neglected.

Local pressures, too, have been not relevant in shaping government action. External pressures seem to have been the primary concern. The development of a services-based economy was an overarching priority, where international recognition for attracting tourism and being an environmental leader on the continent outweighed the desire to use substitute economies and support the manufacturing sector as a source of employment. The bet paid off by encouraging international praise for being a 'clean' capital (Clavel, 2014). Although the government reasoned that services could provide a source of significant employment, skills have lagged and the strategy has not resulted in the creation of enough employment opportunities for the large numbers entering the workforce every year (Behuria and Goodfellow, 2019). The often-criticised 'authoritarian' aspects of the Rwandan government have coexisted alongside a progressive reputation on the climate front, suggesting that environmental policies may be partly motivated by a desire to improve the country's reputation. The next section describes why Kenya's implementation of the plastic bag ban has been comparatively slower.

5. Kenya: 'best practice' against business power?

The Kenyan government has announced bans on plastic bags four times since 2005. Kenya's plastic manufacturers have consistently voiced their concerns about anti-plastic bag action both independently and through the Kenyan Association of Manufacturers (KAM). While the instrumental power of these businesses was ineffective in blocking legislation, their structural power (and the support of 'instrumental power' through the continued advocacy of business associations) influenced the limited implementation of the ban. Nevertheless, in 2018, a ban was implemented. This raises the question of why the government was motivated to implement the ban and why resistance was weaker. There are initial indications that the ban has been successful, with local manufacturers ceasing production. The following paragraphs suggest that a combination of local and external pressure has taken priority over structural power to facilitate the government's recent ban.

Both the Kenyan government and UNEP have worked to combat challenges associated with plastic waste, particularly highlighting the damage it has caused to Nairobi, known as 'The Green City in the Sun' in the 1970s (Njeru, 2006). The hazards associated with plastic waste in Kenya received global attention in the early 2000s, when the pervasive practice of defecating in plastic bags in Nairobi's informal settlements was reported in the international press. Such practices were publicly dubbed 'flying toilets or 'scud missiles'. As a response to pressure from local and international environmental activists, the Kenyan government worked with UNEP to publish a report (UNEP, 2005) that recommended a ban on thin bags and a levy on thicker bags in the country. In 2005, the government implemented its first ban, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of plastic bags with a thickness of 30 microns. The then President Mwai Kibaki's administration developed a 10-point plan aimed at addressing plastic waste, with the promise of providing funds for alternative, environmentally friendly carrier bags (Kairu, 2017a). Nobel Prize Winner Wangari Maathai was appointed Assistant Minister of Environment in 2004, underscoring the Kibaki government's commitment to environmental protection (Njeru, 2006). Preceding her appointment and after she left the government, Maathai acted as a public voice against plastic waste (Maathai, 2007; Gorsevski, 2012).

Despite (what appeared to be) the government's determination to ban plastic bags, there were already concerns that implementation was "sluggish" (Njeru, 2006, p 1052). The structural power of business shone through in narratives challenging the ban. Plastic bag producers and traders protested, arguing that it would cause losses in employment of factory workers, workers in supply outlets and street families engaged in distribution. Kenya's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) also took the side of the manufacturers, declaring that implementation would result in job losses for more than 4000 Kenyans (Njeru, 2006). In 2007, another attempt was made and the manufacture of plastic bags of less than 30 microns was again outlawed, with a 120% excise duty also placed on them. Traders protested and threatened to pass on the extra cost of making thicker polythene to the consumer (Kairu, 2017a). In 2011, NEMA announced a new ban – covering larger ground than previous ones – on plastic bags below thickness of 60 microns. Similar protests followed.

Between 2010 and 2014, Kenya's annual plastic production expanded by a third, to 400,000 tonnes.[23] There has been growing pressure from local activist groups, foreign environmental agencies (UNEP), the press and social media (through the popular hashtag #banplasticsKE, which was supported through a re-tweet by Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources) (Obiria, 2017). In 2017, pressure on the government contributed to finally combating the structural power of manufacturers. A draconian ban came into effect on 28 August, which threatened up to four years in prison or fines of $40,000 for anyone producing, selling or even carrying a plastic bag. Government officials said that, initially, manufacturers and retailers would be targets rather than ordinary people. There are already reports of arrests and raids around the country and Nairobi's Burma market was shut down for widespread noncompliance with the ban (Watts, 2018). Businesses have continued to protest, using instrumental power, through the KAM. KAM argued by reminding the government of the structural power of businesses, stating that the ban would cost 60,000 jobs and force 176 manufacturers to close, while also contributing a loss to exports, since Kenya exported plastic bags across the region.[24] Before implementing the ban, the Kenyan government had provided a six-month period for plastic manufacturers to become compliant but KAM officials argued that government policy was "too strict" and "didn't give any chance to companies who had invested in the production of plastic for decades and employed

[23] 'Kenya tries to ban plastic bags – again'. *The Economist*, 23 March 2017.
[24] Interview, senior KAM offical, February 2018.

thousands of Kenyans".[25] Although KAM was currently negotiating with the government to reduce the severity of the ban and to create more allowances for manufacturers, one local plastic firm (Hi-Plast) filed a lawsuit against the government for compensation (Kiplagat, 2018).

In comparison to Rwanda, Kenya's manufacturing companies have had visibly more power over recent decades. The famous Kenya debate of the 1970s largely centred on the nature and developmental potential of the emerging local (including Asian Kenyan) bourgeoisie.[26] While the debate never came to a conclusion, it became clear that a relatively strong group of manufacturers had become prominent by the 1990s (Himbara, 1994). Many politicians – including the current President Uhuru Kenyatta's family and previous presidents like Daniel Arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki – owned some of the largest business portfolios in the country, thus demonstrating the direct influence of structural power in influencing policy. Significantly, Arriola (2013) also highlights how Kenyan politicians depended on funds from domestic manufacturers for elections.

Within the plastic sector, the direct involvement of several large diversified business groups and the influence of those groups in business associations like KAM meant that instrumental power facilitated avenues through which implementation could be blocked.[27] Within Kenya, KAM is known as 'a big boys' club', with the largest local manufacturers historically dominating the association.[28] This suggests that diversified business groups were relatively well organised and shows how, although KAM may have been unsuccessful in blocking legislation, the association was successful in using instrumental power to maintain consistent advocacy efforts.

A large Kenyan business group – Ramco –imported 15 million shillings- worth of equipment in March before the plastic ban was announced As a result of the continued influence of the structural power of such large business groups, despite losing a majority of their plastic manufacturing business, groups like Ramco and Bobmil Industries managed to obtain special clearances to manufacture a limited number of plastic bags for the local food processing industry (Kairu, 2017b). Manufacturing and agribusiness companies working outside the plastics sector were also worried about banning domestic production of plastic materials, given that these materials provided cheap packaging to export other products. KAM officials were concerned that "inspectors have interpreted it to mean all packaging, which hurts the majority of manufacturers".[29] Retail chains – both local and international – which were among the most profitable companies in the country, were also worried about additional costs, given that paper and cloth bags were more expensive than plastic ones.[30]

[25] Interview, senior KAM official, February 2018.
[26] See Kitching (1985) for a discussion of the literature on the Kenya debate.
[27] Interviews, owners and managers, Kenyan manufacturing companies, February 2018.
[28] Interview, owner, Kenyan business, February 2018.
[29] Interview, senior KAM official, February 2018.
[30] Interview, senior KAM official, February 2018.

One of the most significant consequences of the ban on plastic bags has been the associated job losses. Manufacturers claimed that they had to let between 60% and 90% of their workforces go, while KAM argued that it had a much more penetrating effect on job losses across the manufacturing, retail and agro-processing sectors.[31] It is common for plastic bag producers to use the discourse of poverty eradication to protect their operations but a blanket ban on plastic bags did little to solve the structural issues and poverty that had made plastic bags the target of environmental concern. Njeru (2006) argues that the infamous use of 'flying toilets' was a result of 'exclusionary governance' and an 'unequal terrain of power relations', which meant that residents in Nairobi's informal settlements organised their own services depending on the resources available to them. Thus, in the absence of adequate toilets, most residents preferred to defecate in plastic bags inside their houses and throw them away on rooftops or in available open space or water drains.

The government's choice to finally commit to implementing a ban on plastic bags helps explain why governments implement environmental policies despite the existence of strong business power. So why did the government meet the anti-plastic bag environmental norm when this could threaten political finance (from business groups) and manufacturing jobs – two important factors that will mean a great deal once election campaigning begins again? The current President, Uhuru Kenyatta, is in his last term in office so perhaps that is a consideration. However, Vice-President William Ruto is likely to run for the presidency in the next election. The International Criminal Court indicted both Kenyatta and Ruto, alleging they had prominent roles in orchestrating post-electoral violence in 2007 (although charges have now been dropped). Of course, it is a common strategy for politicians in developing countries, who have tarnished international reputations (like India's Narendra Modi), to turn to environmental concerns to emphasise their progressive characteristics. Arguably, Rwandan President Kagame's determination to be a champion of the environment stems partly from similar concerns.

However, there is significant evidence that the interaction of local and global pressures contributed to the change in the Kenyan government's stance on implementing the ban on plastic bags. Eminent personalities like Mathai and other local activists like James Wakibia, who started the twitter hashtag #banplasticKE, along with other civil society groups, have consistently demanded government action on plastic waste. In UNEP, these activists had an ally to pressure the government to deliver on their promises of taking action against plastic bags. Businesses were particularly critical of UNEP pressure, arguing that "because UNEP is here, the government took action otherwise no one would have this. The government is usually pro-business."[32] The ignominy that had developed around the 'flying toilets' narrative also contributed to the government committing to take action (although, clearly, there was a degree of absurdity in tackling the problem by banning plastic bags rather than dealing with the structural inequities lead-

[31] Interviews, owners, Kenyan manufacturing companies and senior officials, KAM, February 2018.
[32] Interview, owner, Kenyan manufacturing company, February 2018.

ing to the prevalence of ‘flying toilets’). Businesses, too, have begun to notice that the tide is turning and, although some continue to see the ban as ‘unfair’ or argue that it functions as a “block to industrialisation”, others recognise that “plastics cannot be a long-term investment for us with sentiment changing”.[33]

Despite clear evidence of the strength of business power in Kenya, the government’s industrial focus is limited. Promises were made to encourage substitute economies but manufacturers said there were no incentives on offer. Despite this, in 2018, several local companies began producing cloth bags, perceiving “an opportunity in the market”, although some of those companies were in very different sectors (including trading of steel products).[34] Investments in substitute economies have occurred in spite of limited government support. One example is Alternative Energy Solutions (AES), which plans to shape a circular economy in the plastics industry by producing synthetic oil from plastic waste (Horvath et al, 2018).

The salience of structural power is a key explanatory factor in the evolution of Kenya’s adoption and slow implementation of the plastic ban. Yet the government’s recent decision to stringently implement the ban seems puzzling. This section has argued that a confluence of local and international pressures motivated the government to act. Currently, local and international pressures have overriden domestic business power in Kenya. The next section examines the case of Uganda, where implementation of the plastic ban has been slower and more contested, despite plastic manufacturers having comparatively less business power.

6. Uganda: structural power reigns against environmental policy

The Ugandan case presents an example where business power and inter-ministerial disagreements have slowed the implementation of the ban on plastic bags. The weak implementation of the ban aligns with the characterisation of President Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) government as a ‘weak dominant’ party, “with a generally weakened capacity and commitment to deliver development other than through clientelistic measures” (Hickey and Izama, 2017, p 166). The NRM government’s ideological commitment to structural transformation (and associated support for the manufacturing sector) (Hickey, 2005, 2013) has historically been at odds with domestic pressure groups and external influences, painting a picture of a fractured government, carefully picking the strategic sectors on which to impose its will.

The plastics sector is one example where existing business power (or at least, structural power) has not been challenged, with the ban yet to be implemented. This is despite local environmental groups – like the National Association of Professional Environmentalists – consistently urging the government to implement anti-plastic bag legislation. The actions of neighbouring governments have been a boost for local activists.

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[33] Interview, manager, Kenyan manufacturing company, February 2018.
[34] Interview, owner, Kenyan manufacturing company, February 2018.

However, UNEP's influence has been less salient, although its officials are interviewed (and UNEP reports are used) to be cited as evidence in support of the plastic ban. Plastic manufacturers have also been organised and their instrumental power is visible, lobbying the government through the Ugandan Plastics Manufacturers and Recyclers Association (UPMRA), which works closely with the Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA). UPMRA has 28 members, with some of these involved in plastic recycling. Some of the country's largest business groups, like NICE House of Plastics and the Mukwano Group of Companies, are UPMRA members. Other large firms in the plastics manufacturing industry include Africa Polysack and Luuka Plastics. The plastics sector has been an important component of Uganda's manufacturing sector, with one study recommending plastics as a strategic bet for the country's future growth (Hausmann et al, 2014).

Uganda's plastic bag ban was initially announced in 2007 but it was not until 2009 that then finance minister, Syda Bbuma, in her 2009–10 national budget speech, announced the decision to ban *kaveera* (or plastic materials) of less than 30 microns and proposed an excise duty of 120% on all plastic products. Traders and manufacturers immediately protested, through UPMRA and the UMA, which led to limited implementation. Thus, while instrumental power was unable to block legislation, the structural power of businesses was manifest through the inability of the government to implement it. Instrumental power – through the use of UMA and UPMRA as advocacy groups – helped to remind the government of the structural power of businesses.

In April 2015, Uganda's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) tried again by implementing a ban on the manufacture and use of polythene bags less than 30 microns thick. However, it was quickly postponed, with the then prime minister, Ruhakana Ruganda, saying that the ban would have to be discussed with other ministries and stakeholders before implantation (Barigaba, 2017). Gradually, NEMA became more aggressive, with several incidents of inspectors raiding shops selling plastic bags and closing factories after impounding plastic products.[35] UPMRA's members responded by claiming that they had invested over 8.5 million dollars in the previous 21 years, paid more than 4.5 billion Ugandan shillings in taxes and employed around 8,800 Ugandans (Tajuba, 2015). The instrumental power of businesses (through links with politicians and the advocacy of business organisations) effectively split the government, with some politicians supporting strong anti-plastic bag actions and others worried about the impact such legislation would have on employment and disinvestment.

By 2018, the issue of plastic waste had cascaded, showing how different segments of government were continuing to contest the issue of implementing a ban on plastic bags. In June of that year, President Museveni again announced his intention to implement a ban on plastic bags, ordering 45 plastic manufacturers (38 of which were involved in making carrier bags) and other stakeholders to stop the manufacture, distribution, sale and use of plastics (Leni, 2018). However, by October, the Minister of Trade was call-

[35] Interview, mid-ranking official, UPMRA, April 2018.

ing for a gradual phase-out of production and use of plastic bags rather than a complete ban, including the imposition of a green levy on manufacturers of plastic and plastic products (*Daily Monitor*, 4 October 2018; *The Observer*, 2 November 2018). In November, Museveni changed his position, announcing his opposition to the ban on plastic bags and arguing instead for a greater emphasis on recycling (*The Observer*, 2 November 2018). Museveni's recent change of tune preceded the discussion of a new National Environment Bill in Parliament a few days later. Committee Chair Keefa Kiwanuka announced the decision to ban polythene bags weighing less than 30 microns after holding talks with stakeholders (including manufacturers and environmental activists) (*The Independent*, 15 November 2018). The new National Environment Bill still has to be agreed by the president and it remains unclear whether the ban will be implemented. However, the issue of banning plastic bags has shown clear evidence of how business power has influenced a split within government on the implementation of anti-plastic bag policies.

The president himself has fluctuated in his position on the implementation of the ban.[36] Business power (and particularly the structural power of plastic manufacturers) remains strong. One UMA official emphasised the dangers of "losing jobs because of a policy mismatch" where the government has not allowed enough time for substitute industries and recycling facilities to be supported.[37] Since even those arguing for a plastic ban admit that plastics will inevitably enter the country, companies argue that banning them in Uganda will not reduce their use.[38]

However, structural power operates in an inconsistent policy environment where the government fluctuates between catering to different interests. Although firms were satisfied that the government had not taken a heavy-handed attitudes to implementation, as the Rwandan government did, some argued that the uncertain policy environment contributed to their reluctance to invest further in their plant.[39] For their part, as early as 2009, some UPMRA members appear to have reacted to the government's intention to implement the ban, with companies negotiating with NEMA to integrate plastic recycling plants in their factories.[40] However, a large number have not invested in recycling.[41] Although government officials disagree about the way in which the ban should be handled, many favour a phasing out of the production and use of plastics.[42]

[36] Interview, Ugandan journalist, April 2018.
[37] Interview, senior management, UMA, April 2018.
[38] Interviews, senior management, UMA; senior official, Ugandan Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives; Ugandan environmental activist, April 2018.
[39] Interviews, owners, Ugandan manufacturers, April 2018.
[40] Interview, mid-ranking official, UPMRA, April 2018.
[41] Interview, Ugandan environmental activist, April 2018.
[42] Interview, senior official, Ugandan Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, April 2018.

> Even many companies know that the time is ending for plastics. It may create jobs and, in the Ministry of Industry, we care about that. But you have to see what damage it is doing to our environment.[43]

Local pressures, on the other hand, seem less salient in shaping the Ugandan government's position. Instead, even local civil society activists – like those in National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)– claim that the government's announcements to implement the ban are merely window dressing for external actors to meet their regional commitments to legislative bills passed in the East African Legislative Assembly.[44] For its part, NAPE has consistently pressured the government to implement action against the use of plastic bags, regularly voicing concerns in national newspapers and on television. However, unlike in Kenya, the group has lacked external support or the support of eminent personalities (like Maathai) who could apply additional pressure from different channels. External pressure, too, seems restricted to the regional level. Observers link Museveni's recent threats (in June 2018) to plastic manufacturers to pressure from the EAC after the EAC Polythene Materials Control Bill was passed in 2017.[45]

Uganda's failed implementation of the plastic ban thus far presents a story different from the stuttering implementation in Kenya and the heavy-handed implementation in Rwanda. The Ugandan case shows that the structural power of domestic plastics businesses perseveres within an inconsistent policy environment where the government struggles to cater to disparate interest groups. It also suggests that the Ugandan government is less concerned with the material benefits of banning plastic bags, since the opportunities associated with substitute economies were never mentioned in interviews and rarely discussed in public newspapers.

7. Conclusion

As countries become concerned with how to embrace green growth or to pursue sustainable industrialisation, it is likely that more developing countries will choose to adopt the attitudes of state action, evident within the ecological modernisation literature. Clapp and Swanston (2009) have emphasised how the pressures to pursue environmental policies are internal in developing countries, as much as they are external. When discussing the barriers to the implementation of environmental policy – and particularly, anti-plastic bag legislation – it is commonplace to assume business power remains a significant barrier. Such arguments hold sway both within academic scholarship (Clapp and Swanston, 2009) and the national press of developing countries. For example, in one story, Rwanda's successful implementation was directly attributed to

[43] Interview, senior official, Ugandan Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, April 2018.
[44] Interview, Ugandan environmental activist, April 2018.
[45] Interview, journalist at regional newspaper, November 2018.

the country having a smaller and younger private sector compared with its neighbours (Musoke, 2017). However, business power explanations do little in terms of telling us how there may be a variation in implementation, a weakness that has been cited in the literature on structural power.

As Bell (2012) emphasises, the business power literature requires a more detailed explanation of what influences governments in their decisions to implement environmental policies. Environmental policies are implemented at the cost of prevailing business power. In the case of banning plastic bags, plastic manufacturers, traders and retailers (and the broader manufacturing sector) can use their influence to obstruct implementation (instrumental power) or could also wield less direct influence through reminding the government of the threat of disinvestment and loss of employment that anti-plastic bag actions may incur (structural power).The broader manufacturing sector, which uses plastic bags in the transport of their goods, may also leverage its influence to lobby against bans.

A comparative examination of business power explains why Rwanda has been more successful in implementing the plastic bag ban than Uganda and Kenya. However, to examine why implementation has been taken more seriously in Kenya compared to Uganda, the paper argues that a broader understanding of the local and external pressures at play should be considered. Local pressures appear in the form of local environmental activism – which often works alongside external pressure from regional East African governments and international civil society groups and UNEP. Clapp and Swanston (2009) argue that the diffusion of the anti-plastic bag environmental norm has been non-networked and has resulted from local pressure. However, this paper has demonstrated that external pressures have operated in different ways. In Rwanda (and, to a lesser extent, in Kenya), external pressure understandings interact with business power explanations to highlight a more material explanation for the government's implementation of a plastic ban: the government is aiming to build a services-based economy, heavily dependent on foreign exchange received through tourism, whereby the country will gain international recognition as an environmental leader and become an international and regional hub for various services. In Kenya, external (through UNEP), local and regional (through the East African Legislative Assembly) environmental activism has also had a strong influence on motivating government officials to implement their plans. In comparison, Uganda's external and local pressures appear minimal and the government is more conflicted about taking on the business power of manufacturers.

Anti-plastic bag actions are fast becoming a sign of environmental best practice. Although developing countries appear to be taking more stringent action than advanced countries, implementation varies considerably. This paper has broadened our understanding of why implementation has varied across developing countries by showing how local and external pressures, along with business power, have shaped the implementation of plastic bag bans. Clearly, ecological modernisation theory has some sway in African countries and governments must be considered as key actors in implementing environmental policy. However, to understand the pressures under which governments operate, a broader understanding of competing pressure groups (business power, local and external) should be brought into our analysis. Such analyses are even more important when considering the prospects for supporting substitute economies or 'circular economies', where new material opportunities may be an outcome of the successful implementation of environmental policy. Developing countries may be far behind in investing in technological capabilities, but the possibilities for leapfrogging exist if political pressure allows it.

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