

The urban political ecology of plastic bag waste problem in Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract:

Over 24 million plastic bags are consumed in Kenya monthly. More than half of the bags end up in the solid waste stream. Plastic bags now constitute the biggest challenge to solid waste management in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya and home to three million people. As a result, plastic bag waste has attracted great political and public attention, especially because the waste has myriad unique environmental problems. This paper seeks to unravel the problem of plastic bag waste in Nairobi through an urban political ecological perspective. Urban political ecology has done much to excavate economic, political, and cultural processes, as well as ecological dynamics that create and re-create urban environments. Little has been done in this context with respect to urban solid waste problems, with the exception of urban political ecology of environmental justice. However, research done within the context of urban political ecology of environmental justice has mainly focused on solid waste problems in the Western World, particularly USA. Drawing on research conducted in Nairobi, as well literature on business and politics, and solid waste management in Kenya, this paper examines the nature of plastic bag waste problem, its political–economic roots and implications for environmental justice.