Waste Management in Uganda: Challenges and Policy Opportunities

POLICY NOTE

As urbanisation accelerates and consumption patterns evolve, the volume and complexity of waste by-products continue to rise, making them an inevitable consequence of human life and economic activity. Yet if not properly managed, these materials pose a serious threat to environmental quality, public health, and urban liveability.

Uganda stands at a pivotal moment in reshaping its approach to urban waste management. Harnessing insights from research, learning from the experiences of other cities, and building on the commitment of both government and communities can set the stage for cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable urban centres. Waste should be reframed as an opportunity: a source of materials for recycling, energy for households, and jobs for young people, rather than a burden to be managed. This shift toward a circular economy aligns with national development and environmental priorities, while also unlocking tangible social and economic benefits.

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Waste can be defined as any substance or material that has no further use in terms of its original purpose for production, transformation, or consumption, and which is subsequently discarded as valueless and unwanted (WHO, 2024). In practical terms, the concept encompasses an array of items generated by households, firms, and other economic agents, from domestic garbage and food scraps to industrial packaging, paper, plastics, and other forms of residues. As urbanisation accelerates and consumption patterns evolve, the volume and complexity of such by-products continue to rise, making them an inevitable consequence of human life and economic activity. Yet if not properly managed, these materials pose a serious threat to environmental quality, public health, and urban liveability.

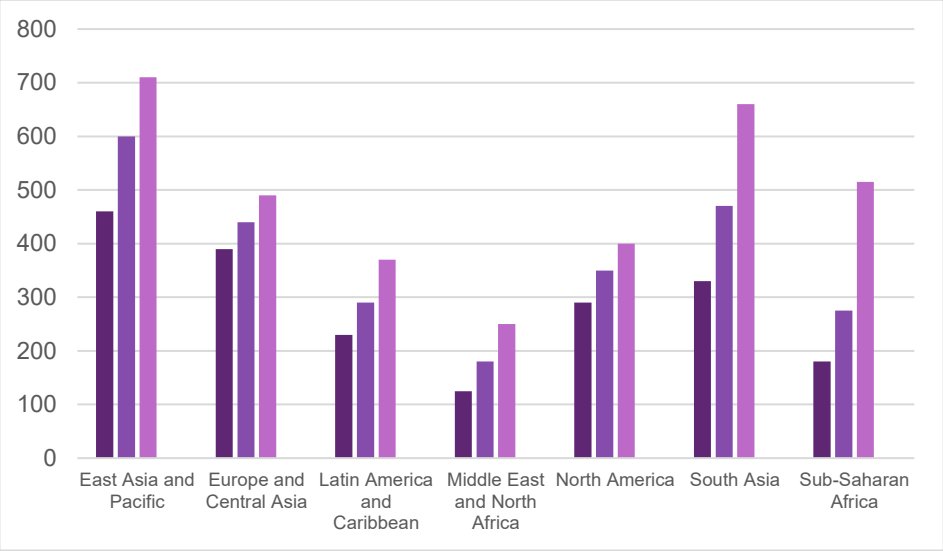
In this context, gaining a clear understanding of how waste management is approached across countries - what strategies are in place, where critical gaps persist, and what opportunities remain untapped - becomes a vital first step.

This policy note zooms in on the case of Uganda, drawing on research-driven evidence presented by Mark Buntaine and Smith Matsiko during the June 2025 Sustainability Conference, jointly hosted by the International Growth Centre (IGC) and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED). Overall, it seeks to inform and guide national and city-level actors by offering a snapshot of the country's current landscape, identifying key challenges, and outlining actionable strategies to improve service delivery. The focus is on solid waste and the systems required to manage it safely, efficiently, and sustainably.

Overview of waste generation and management globally

Solid waste generation is rising at an unprecedented pace worldwide, making it one of the most pressing environmental and urban governance issues of the 21st century. The World Bank (2018) estimates that annual global municipal waste will increase from about 2.01 billion tons in 2016 to 3.40 billion tons by 2050 - a nearly 70% surge under a business-as-usual scenario. Much of this growth will be concentrated in developing regions: sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are expected to account for 35% of the world's refuse by mid-century, with Africa alone projected to triple its volumes, from 174 million tons in 2016 to more than 516 million in 2050 (Figure 1).

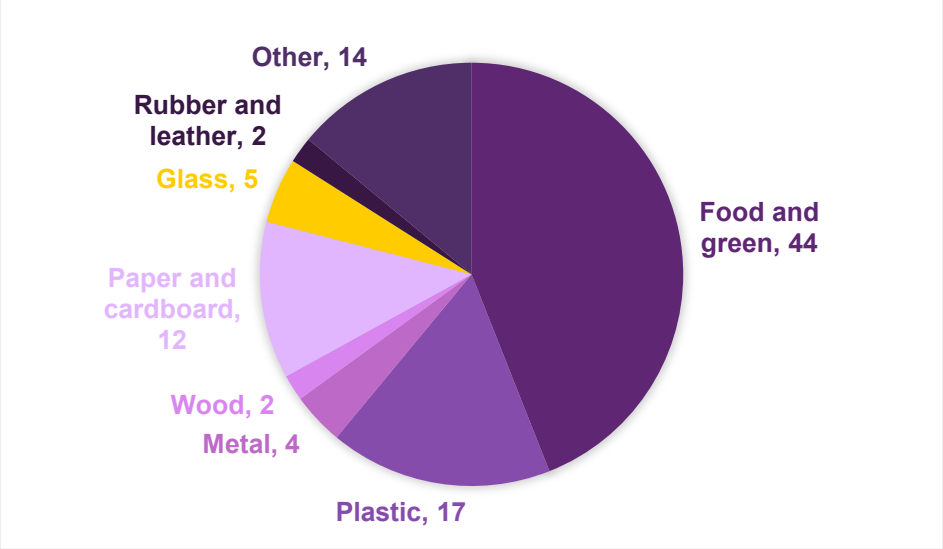
Figure 1: Total waste generation by region (million tons)



Source: World Bank's What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050 (Kaza et al. 2018)

The central policy question, however, is not only the sheer quantity of waste to be handled but also its composition. The types of materials entering the disposal stream shape both the scale of environmental impacts and the economic feasibility of treatment and recycling (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Global waste composition (%)



Source: Taken from https://datatopics.worldbank.org/what-a-waste/trends_in_solid_waste_management.html

Composition varies significantly across income contexts. In low-income cities, organic content dominates, reflecting the fresh produce predominant in diets, limited packaging, and the prevalence of food scraps from households and markets. By contrast, higher-income regions such as Europe, North America, and parts of East Asia display more diversified refuse, with a greater portion of 'dry' materials like plastics, paper, metals, and glass (World Bank, 2018). These are generally easier to recover and can feed into established recycling markets, whereas high-moisture organics present challenges for collection and disposal, degrading quickly and generating toxins.

Tailored strategies to these profiles are therefore essential: source separation, organics diversion (through composting or anaerobic digestion), and targeted improvements in collection and transfer can reduce system costs, cut emissions, and expand circular-economy opportunities. Some countries have made strides along this path, yet at the global level only a minority of waste is managed in safe and sustainable ways. As of 2018, only 13.5% of waste was recycled, 5.5% composted, and roughly one-third to 40% was still dumped or openly burned without treatment. The remainder went to sanitary landfills or waste-to-energy facilities.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the gap is especially acute. Municipal authorities commonly operate with limited financial resources, outdated equipment, and overlapping institutional mandates, all of which undermine the development of coherent waste systems. Furthermore, service provision is highly uneven, with coverage concentrated in central districts, leaving peri-urban areas and smaller towns underserved. These difficulties are compounded by rapid urbanisation, which pushes population growth far ahead of infrastructure investment and creates a persistent mismatch between the volumes generated and the capacity to process them safely (Matsiko, 2025).

For instance, estimates suggest that up to 93% of waste in the region is mismanaged, compared with only 2–3% in advanced economies. With few engineered landfills or treatment facilities, most cities rely on improvised arrangements that are neither environmentally sound nor financially viable. Recycling systems are also at a very early stage; although 70–80% of urban waste is technically recyclable, only about 4% is recovered due to weak sorting mechanisms, limited market demand, and low levels of investment (UNEP, 2018). The recovery that does take place is largely driven by the informal sector, particularly waste pickers and scrap dealers, who play a critical role in salvaging plastics and metals but often work in inadequate conditions and without formal recognition.

The consequences of these dynamics are evident across many African cities. Discarded refuse clogs storm drains and waterways, triggering recurrent flash floods during the rainy season and, in some cases, landslides on saturated

slopes. In Lagos, Nigeria, for example, plastic bags, Styrofoam, and other debris routinely choke open gutters, forcing water to back up into streets. Once water stagnates, trash-filled pools become breeding grounds for mosquitoes and rodents, accelerating the spread of malaria, cholera, and other waterborne diseases (Pulitzer Center, 2023). Costs are later absorbed not only by city authorities - through clean-up operations, drain desilting, emergency response outlays, and infrastructure repairs - but also by households and businesses, which lose income due to closures, spoiled inventory, and missed workdays.

The environmental toll is also severe. Leachate from dumpsites infiltrates soil and groundwater, while decomposing organics release methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide. Such conditions drive higher rates of asthma, bronchitis, and other respiratory illnesses, simultaneously weakening public health systems and economic productivity, and locking urban areas into a burdensome cycle of reaction rather than prevention (Buntaine, 2025).

Uganda is not exempt. The recent creation of new city administrations, combined with limited service coverage and heavy reliance on open dumping, has produced a system under strain. As the following section exhibits, the country's waste profile reflects both the challenges and opportunities faced by sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, offering important lessons for policy design and implementation.

Closer look at Uganda: Kampala and secondary cities

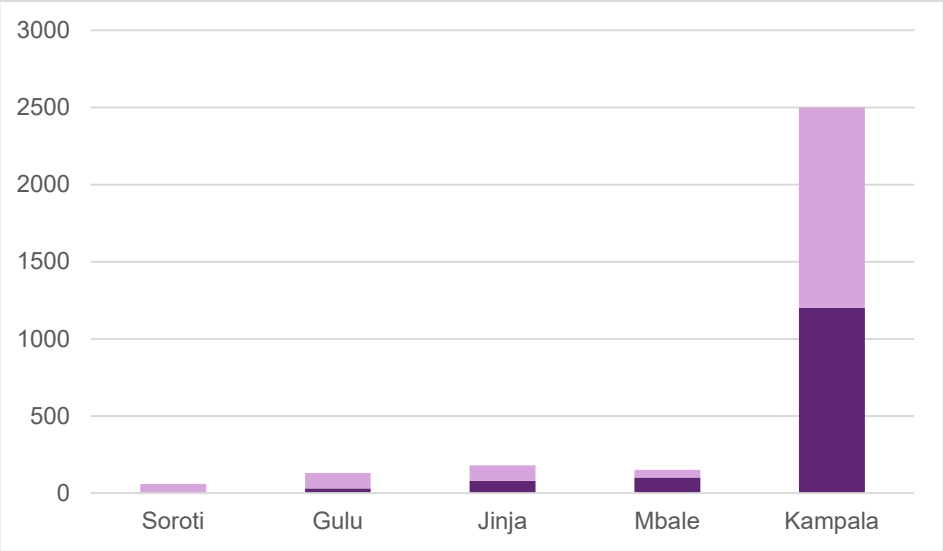
Across the Pearl of Africa, waste management responsibilities are decentralised, with local governments in charge of collection, transportation, and disposal within their jurisdictions. Central agencies – such as the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) and Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) – set policy, issue standards, and provide technical guidance. In recent years, many urban authorities have experimented with public–private partnerships (PPPs), contracting private firms and working with informal actors to extend services. Despite these efforts, conditions remain uneven between the capital city, Kampala, and secondary cities such as Jinja, Gulu, Mbale, and Soroti, all of which are grappling with mounting pressures.

Kampala

Kampala, the capital, produces by far the largest volumes of waste in the country. According to Buntaine (2025), the city generates around 2,500 tons each day. Despite progress – collection rates have risen from about 35% in 2016 to 49% in 2023 –inadequate coverage remains a defining obstacle. More than half of the daily output is still dumped in wetlands or burned in residential

areas. Figure 3 contrasts its daily generation and managed volumes with those of other major municipalities, highlighting both the capital's heavier absolute load and the systemic weaknesses that shape waste services nationwide.

Figure 3: Estimated daily waste generation vs collection in selected Ugandan cities (2023)



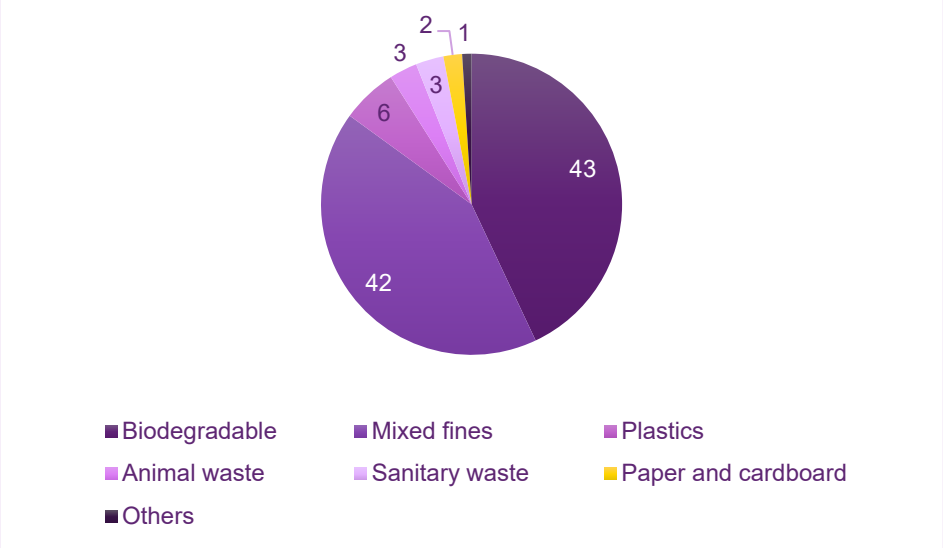
Source: Estimated Daily Waste Generation vs. Collection in Selected Ugandan Cities (in tons per day). Secondary cities generate smaller quantities than Kampala (e.g. Jinja ~180, Mbale ~150, Gulu ~130, Soroti ~60 t/d) but generally collect less than half; in some cases only a small fraction is collected.

To date, all of Kampala's waste that is formally removed is transported to the Kiteezi landfill, the only official disposal site. Originally designed as an open dump without full sanitary controls, Kiteezi has long surpassed its intended capacity. By 2020, it was receiving around 1,400 tons daily and had already operated a decade beyond its planned lifespan, creating severe stability issues and widespread pollution. In August 2024, a partial collapse killed dozens of people living and working nearby; this tragedy exposed both the environmental and human costs of inadequate disposal infrastructure. In response, KCCA launched plans for a new sanitary landfill at Dundu (Mukono) under a PPP arrangement, coupled with an integrated recycling facility. Until this new system is operational, however, the existing site continues to function under increasingly precarious conditions.

The situation at Kiteezi is further complicated by the nature of the waste it receives. As shown in Figure 4, approximately 85% consists of organic and fine materials that rapidly decompose, producing leachate and methane gas (Matsiko, 2025). Attempts to divert organics have been piloted – for example, distributing sacks to households to separate food waste for composting or

animal feed – but these remain small-scale. Recovery of plastics and other recyclables is carried out mainly by informal actors and a handful of private firms, with only 10–15% of total volumes being reclaimed. The city has expressed interest in more advanced approaches such as waste-to-energy through incineration or biogas generation, yet none of these options have progressed beyond preliminary discussions.

Figure 4: Composition of municipal solid waste at Kampala's Kiteezi landfill



Even with persistent gaps, Kampala has made early efforts to reform its waste sector. The Waste Collection and Management Master Plan, developed by MoLG with support from international partners, sets out a roadmap to professionalise the system. Its objectives include expanding collection coverage to underserved areas, improving regulation and monitoring of private operators, introducing waste minimisation and recycling initiatives, and piloting more advanced technologies such as composting and waste-to-energy. By focusing on public awareness campaigns, community-based collection models, and the gradual integration of informal workers into formal systems, the strategy aims to establish targets that reduce open dumping and increase the share of waste diverted from landfills.

To complement the latter, equity measures have also been introduced. In 2022, the government directed KCCA to provide free garbage services in informal settlements, operationalised through a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with private firms. The initiative sought to guarantee basic service in low-income neighbourhoods where user fees (UGX 3,000–30,000 per month) are prohibitive. While implementation has been uneven, these steps signal a growing recognition of the importance of solid waste management not only for

environmental sustainability but also for public health and the liveability of Uganda's rapidly growing capital.

Secondary cities (Jinja, Gulu, Mbale, Soroti)

As depicted in Figure 3, Uganda's secondary cities each generate between 50 and 200 tons of waste per day. Yet collection rates frequently fall below 50%, constrained by limited truck capacity – whether because of ageing fleets or chronic fuel shortages – and by disposal sites that are poorly managed or already stretched beyond their intended capacity.

Infrastructure investments have also struggled to deliver lasting improvements. Many municipalities, often with donor support, have acquired waste processing equipment, but sustaining operations has proven far more difficult. Insufficient budgets, lack of technical expertise, and limited political backing frequently leave such facilities underused. The result is idle infrastructure alongside continued environmental and public health risks. This pattern is evident in Jinja, where the Masese landfill (12 acres) is essentially full and located close to schools and homes, emitting foul odours and leachate (World Bank, 2011). Mbale's Doko site once hosted a composting plant installed under a Clean Development Mechanism project, but it was abandoned and later vandalised. Soroti invested in a UGX 400 million recycling plant to turn waste into compost, yet the facility stalled due to operational challenges (Monitor, 2024).

Despite these shortfalls, there are also encouraging signs of progress. In some cities, officials have proposed a waste-to-energy project that would establish a biogas plant capable of generating an estimated 2.8 MW of electricity from municipal waste, for which they are seeking $15 million in funding. Gulu has seen community-driven initiatives, such as youth groups collecting plastics for recycling, alongside NGO-led awareness campaigns promoting bottle reuse and the production of eco-bricks. In Arua (northwest Uganda, outside the main focus cities), youth and women's groups have been engaged in door-to-door pickup, achieving moderate success. Altogether, it is shown that with the right incentives and support, smaller urban centres can adopt creative and adaptive solutions.

This snapshot of Kampala and the secondary cities underscore both the magnitude of Uganda's waste problem and the diverse responses under way. The contrast between stalled infrastructure and emerging community-led initiatives shows that waste management is at a crossroads: fragile systems are under strain, yet there are also pathways for innovation. The following section explores these dynamics in greater depth, examining the challenges that constrain performance as well as the opportunities that could shape a more sustainable and inclusive future.

Challenges in Uganda's waste sector

Institutional fragmentation and weak coordination

Uganda's waste governance is hampered by overlapping mandates and limited coordination across agencies. KCCA operates as a special authority with its own legal framework and the ability to contract private operators, giving it a degree of autonomy not enjoyed by other municipalities. In contrast, most secondary cities only gained city status in 2020 and are still setting up solid waste management units, drafting ordinances, and designing revenue mechanisms. This uneven institutional maturity makes it difficult to apply consistent standards.

At the national level, responsibilities are spread across multiple agencies: MoLG oversees local governments, MLHUD handles urban policy, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) regulates environmental compliance, and the Ministry of Water and Environment has a mandate over sanitation and climate-related issues. The absence of a clear lead agency creates duplication in some areas and gaps in others. For example, NEMA can issue directives on landfill standards, but enforcement depends on under-resourced municipal governments; similarly, MoLG sets administrative guidance without aligning it to KCCA's independent framework.

This fragmentation complicates efforts to plan infrastructure investments, enforce waste regulations, or integrate informal actors into formal systems. Even the Waste Collection and Management Master Plan is more comprehensive in Kampala than in secondary cities, leading to a patchwork of approaches.

Chronic underfunding and financial unpredictability

Solid waste management consistently receives a small share of municipal budgets, often insufficient even for fuel and basic operations. Local governments depend heavily on unpredictable central government transfers, which are disbursed late and complicate planning. For instance, Gulu's mayor reported in 2022 that months of delayed disbursements left the city unable to fuel newly donated garbage trucks, leaving the equipment parked and useless despite urgent demand for service.

This problem is systemic rather than incidental. In Uganda's budgeting framework, solid waste management competes with politically visible sectors such as roads, health, and education. These tend to absorb the bulk of both local and national resources, leaving little room for refuse services, which are often perceived as a lower priority. Even when development partners support

infrastructure, such as composting plants or trommel machines, local authorities often lack the recurrent funding needed for operations, staffing, and maintenance. As a result, facilities fall idle and trucks break down without repair, not because assets are unavailable, but because ongoing financing is too constrained to keep them running.

The broader implication is that financial shortfalls, more than technical or infrastructural gaps, are the central bottleneck in the country's waste sector. Without predictable, ring-fenced allocations for operations, even well-designed policies could remain aspirational, as local governments cannot mobilise the resources to put them into practice.

Low public awareness and poor practices

On the community side, behavioural challenges significantly hinder effective waste management. Many residents have limited awareness of proper waste handling, separation, or the health implications of poor disposal.

A study in Kampala found that residents of informal settlements lacked knowledge of how to sort waste or why it would benefit them (Muheirwe et al., 2023). When collection services are inconsistent, people resort to dumping garbage in drainage channels, on vacant land, or in lakes or rivers. Open-air burning of waste is common in many neighborhoods as a quick disposal method - this includes burning plastics and other refuse, which releases harmful pollutants. This is a major source of urban air pollution in Uganda. Changing these habits is difficult without robust public sensitisation campaigns and convenient alternatives (e.g. accessible collection points).

Additionally, because most households do not practice separation of waste at source and nearly all waste is mixed together, opportunities for recycling or composting are missed and the waste stream remains 'dirty', requiring extra labour to sort later, if at all. There is currently little incentive for individuals to manage waste better. Recycling initiatives that do exist (like paying for plastic bottles or organic scraps) reach only a small fraction of the population, and citizens often do not see immediate benefits from separating or containing their waste. In essence, without stronger incentives or enforcement, many people default to the most convenient behaviour, which may be illegal dumping or burning.

Equity and service disparities

Access to waste services in Uganda is highly unequal, reflecting both affordability barriers and gaps in municipal coverage. In many parts of Kampala and almost all secondary cities, low-income households live in informal settlements where waste is collected sporadically, if at all. Private operators

typically charge user fees ranging from UGX 3,000 to 30,000 per month ($0.80–$8) depending on household location and volume, which is prohibitive for poorer residents. Consequently, many households resort to open dumping, burning, or discarding waste in drains and wetlands, with serious health and environmental consequences.

Recognising this gap, in 2022 the government directed KCCA to provide free garbage services in informal settlements. As mentioned, the policy was operationalized through an MoU with private firms, requiring them to serve low-income areas, at no charge, up to a set threshold. In theory, this approach promoted inclusivity and equity. In practice, however, the scheme has proven difficult to sustain. Contractors faced revenue shortfalls because free services were not adequately subsidised, forcing some firms to cut back operations. The result has been irregular or inconsistent service delivery, leaving many informal areas underserved despite the policy's intent.

The disparities are even sharper outside the capital. Urban centres such as Gulu, Mbale, and Soroti rarely provide subsidised waste collection in informal neighbourhoods, largely because they lack both funding and contractual frameworks to extend such services. In these towns, waste often accumulates in community heaps or drainage channels, with removal depending on ad hoc interventions by local leaders or NGOs. This creates a two-tiered system: middle- and high-income neighbourhoods can afford regular private collection, while low-income settlements are left to self-manage, often in unsafe or environmentally damaging ways.

These dynamics highlight a broader policy dilemma: how to reconcile equity goals with financial sustainability. Uganda's efforts to make services more inclusive, such as the free collection policy in Kampala, show political commitment; but without predictable subsidies or innovative financing mechanisms, service disparities persist. This affects urban health and liveability for the poorest residents, and erodes the effectiveness of broader waste management reforms, since uncontrolled dumping from large informal settlements contributes significantly to city-wide waste flows.

Limited integration of recycling and circular economy approaches

Recycling remains a marginal part of Uganda's waste system, constrained by structural, financial, and institutional barriers. Most recovery is led by the informal sector, with thousands of waste pickers salvaging plastics, metals, and paper from dumpsites and streets. However, formal recycling rates remain very low: for plastics, only about 6% of daily waste is collected for recycling, despite an estimated 600 metric tons being generated nationwide. Efforts to strengthen

circularity are under way, but scaling remains difficult due to the following limitations (Table 1).

Table 1: Barriers to recycling and circular economy

Dimension	Key limitations
Collection and sorting	Minimal source separation; households mix waste streams, raising recovery costs and contaminating recyclables.
Role of informal sector	Recycling dominated by informal pickers who lack recognition, safety protections, or stable contracts.
Recovery rates	Less than 10–15% of total waste is recycled; only ~6% of plastics are recovered despite large volumes.
Infrastructure	Facilities are small-scale, under-mechanised, and often export raw materials rather than adding local value.
Economic incentives	Virgin plastic is cheaper than recycled alternatives; weak markets and lack of subsidies discourage uptake.
Policy and regulation	Circularity strategies exist, but enforcement and financing are limited; Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes are still emerging.
Sustainability	Donor-funded recycling equipment often falls idle due to high operational costs and inadequate maintenance budgets.

Nevertheless, amidst these challenges lie numerous opportunities awaiting exploration. By identifying those and implementing strategic policy recommendations, Uganda can position itself to overcome existing barriers, attract investments, and accelerate the transition toward a green and resilient economy.

Opportunities and policy recommendations

Strengthen institutional coordination and policy frameworks

Establish a national coordination platform or waste management authority that aligns with the forthcoming National Waste Management Policy (2025) to ensure clear mandates, reduce overlaps, and harmonise standards across Kampala and secondary cities. This body should be empowered to translate national policy into city-level action plans, setting measurable targets (e.g., expand coverage to 80% and recycle 25% of total waste by 2030), and integrating waste management into urban planning and budgeting processes.

At the same time, Uganda should develop a centralised database and data management system for solid waste, providing municipalities with accurate information on volumes, composition, and service coverage. Such a system would make it easier to track progress, allocate resources efficiently, and hold operators accountable. To complement this, focusing investment on enforcement capacity (training inspectors, resourcing municipal environment departments, and clarifying inter-agency roles) would strengthen oversight and implementation.

By embedding waste management as a standing priority in city development strategies and equipping local governments with the data and tools they need, the country can move from fragmented, reactive interventions towards a coherent, forward-looking system aligned with circular economy principles.

Secure sustainable and innovative financing mechanisms

Introduce dedicated revenue streams for solid waste management through waste levies, landfill tipping fees, or ring-fenced local taxes earmarked exclusively for operations and maintenance. These measures would give municipalities predictable resources to plan beyond short-term transfers.

Public–private partnerships (PPPs) can play a critical role, but they must be structured with clear financial incentives and risk-sharing mechanisms. For instance, subsidies or performance-based grants could be tied to the reliable servicing of low-income neighbourhoods, ensuring equity without undermining contractor viability.

Uganda can also tap into green financing opportunities. Waste-to-energy projects, composting facilities, and recycling plants align with climate and sustainability agendas, making them eligible for climate finance, carbon credits, and green bonds. Accessing international facilities such as the Green Climate Fund, or issuing municipal green bonds, could provide long-term capital for modern waste infrastructure. At the same time, local banks could be encouraged to design green lending products for small-scale recyclers and circular economy startups, unlocking entrepreneurship and job creation.

Diversifying financing, combining local resource mobilisation with innovative climate-aligned instruments, would speed up the transformation of waste from a budgetary liability into a platform for sustainable urban investment.

Invest in modern disposal and treatment infrastructure

The continued reliance on open dumping and overstretched landfills calls for a shift toward engineered, environmentally safe facilities. Sanitary landfills should be designed with leachate control, methane capture, and phased closure protocols, reducing the risks of pollution, fires, and structural failures.

Investment should also broaden beyond disposal. Composting plants can turn the large share of organic waste (approximately 85% in Kampala) into marketable fertilizer, cutting methane emissions and supporting agriculture. Materials recovery facilities would make recycling more efficient by reducing contamination and supplying industries with cleaner feedstock. Waste-to-energy pilots, such as the proposed Jinja biogas plant, offer additional pathways to transform refuse into usable resources.

To avoid repeating past cases where infrastructure fell idle, projects must be backed by dedicated operational funding, clear accountability mechanisms, and capacity-building for municipal staff and private operators. Contracts should be structured to ensure facilities remain functional and cost-effective.

Finally, treatment capacity should be distributed across multiple urban centres, not concentrated solely in the capital. A network of sub-national treatment hubs would allow smaller cities to pool waste streams, access better technologies, and reduce unit costs. This approach would ease pressure on Kampala while extending reliable services to rapidly growing towns.

Leverage extended producer responsibility schemes

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) places accountability for waste management on manufacturers, importers, and distributors by requiring them to finance or manage the collection, recycling, and safe disposal of the products they put on the market. For Uganda, where plastics and packaging dominate visible waste streams, EPR represents a game-changer for shifting costs from overstretched municipalities to the private sector.

The country has already taken preliminary steps, such as piloting plastic take-back programmes and drafting circular economy strategies. To scale this up, policymakers could mandate that producers of high-volume items, including PET bottles, plastic bags, and single-use packaging, contribute to national recycling funds or directly support collection schemes. For example, beverage companies could be required to finance bottle buy-back centres, while importers of plastic packaging could contribute a levy earmarked for recycling infrastructure.

Well-designed EPR frameworks also create incentives for eco-friendly product design. Producers would be encouraged to reduce packaging, use more recyclable materials, or introduce refill systems, thus reducing waste generation at source. Transparent reporting and monitoring, ideally supported by a central waste database (recommendation no. 1), would be critical to track compliance and evaluate impact.

To ensure inclusivity, Uganda’s EPR system should also integrate the informal recycling sector. Thousands of waste pickers currently salvage plastics and

metals under unsafe conditions; bringing them into producer-financed schemes through cooperatives or contracts would boost recovery rates and enhance livelihoods. Development partners could support training and infrastructure for such integration.

Finally, linking EPR to regional markets would help overcome limited domestic recycling capacity. For instance, plastics collected under EPR could feed into East African recycling hubs, lowering costs through economies of scale. By phasing in mandatory EPR schemes – starting with plastics and gradually expanding to electronics and hazardous waste – Uganda could unlock private investment, strengthen recycling systems, and align with global sustainability commitments.

Enhance public awareness and behavioural change campaigns

Technical solutions cannot succeed without a shift in how citizens handle waste. Building a culture of responsibility requires systematic awareness programmes that make the risks of poor disposal and the benefits of proper practices visible to communities. Campaigns should emphasise the health impacts of open dumping and burning, the link between clogged drains and flooding, and the economic opportunities in recycling.

Schools and universities can serve as early entry points, embedding waste separation and recycling into environmental education curricula. Media outlets and faith-based institutions could amplify the message, while social media campaigns and mobile apps might reach younger audiences. Demonstration projects, such as community composting sites, eco-brick initiatives, or neighbourhood schemes to buy back plastic, provide tangible examples that reinforce behaviour change.

Crucially, awareness must be paired with convenient alternatives. Residents are more likely to stop dumping in drains if collection points are accessible, schedules are reliable, and separation is simple. Incentives can further reinforce change: small rebates for returning bottles, discounts on utility bills for households that separate waste, or community rewards for clean neighbourhoods.

Over time, consistent communication, visible enforcement, and clear incentives can normalise sustainable practices, reduce reliance on informal dumping, and create a social foundation for the circular economy. By treating citizens as active partners rather than passive recipients, waste management reforms become more resilient, equitable, and cost-effective.

Wrapping up

In conclusion, Uganda stands at a pivotal moment in reshaping its approach to urban waste management. Harnessing insights from research, learning from the experiences of other cities, and building on the commitment of both government and communities can set the stage for cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable urban centres. Waste should be reframed as an opportunity: a source of materials for recycling, energy for households, and jobs for young people, rather than a burden to be managed. This shift toward a circular economy aligns with national development and environmental priorities, while also unlocking tangible social and economic benefits.

The recommendations outlined above provide a pathway to this transformation. If acted upon, they would move Kampala, Jinja, Gulu, Mbale, and Soroti toward becoming not only cleaner cities but also more liveable and climate-resilient places for generations to come. The window of opportunity is open: decisive action today will ensure that urbanisation in Uganda advances hand in hand with sustainability, equity, and improved public health for all citizens.

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