

The Legal Paradox of Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: Analyzing the Efficacy of the 2012 Law Banning Non- Biodegradable Plastic In A Context of Failed Implementation

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Abstract: *This article interrogates the profound disconnect between the ambitious legal framework governing plastic waste in Cameroon and its conspicuous failure in implementation. It centers on the 2012 law banning non-biodegradable plastics as a quintessential case study of a regulatory paradox. Through a critical juridical analysis, the study dissects the multifaceted roots of this implementation gap, examining systemic weaknesses in enforcement, institutional capacity, and the law's own technical flaws. The paper further explores the complex interplay between this specific ban and Cameroon's broader environmental legislation, including the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management and the nascent 2024 Forestry Code, to contextualize the failure within the nation's wider governance challenges. By analyzing data and institutional reports, this article elucidates the tangible consequences of this paradox persistent environmental pollution, public health hazards, and the erosion of regulatory legitimacy. Ultimately, it moves beyond diagnosis to propose concrete, holistic recommendations for legal reform and policy realignment, arguing that resolving this paradox necessitates a shift from a simplistic prohibition towards an integrated, circular economy model for plastic waste management.*

Keywords: *Plastic Ban, Legal Paradox, Implementation Failure, Environmental Law, Waste Management, Cameroon.*

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive crisis of plastic pollution represents one of the most formidable environmental challenges of the modern era, a challenge that is acutely felt across the nations of the Global South. In Cameroon, the legislative response to this crisis was crystallized in Law No. 2012/019 of 18 December 2012, relating to the ban on the manufacture, import, and commercialization of non-biodegradable plastic packaging¹. This law, ambitious in its scope and intent, positioned Cameroon as a regional leader in the fight against plastic waste. Its primary objectives were to mitigate the severe visual pollution plaguing urban centers, prevent the chronic clogging of drainage systems a primary cause of devastating floods in cities like Douala and Yaoundé and protect the country's soil and water resources from long-term degradation². On paper, this legal instrument embodied a proactive and commendable commitment to environmental governance.

However, more than a decade after its enactment, a profound and glaring disconnect defines the reality of plastic waste management in Cameroon. The non-biodegradable plastic bags the law explicitly sought to eradicate remain ubiquitous, defining the landscape of markets, streets, and waterways³. This stark contradiction between legislative ambition and tangible reality constitutes a central legal paradox of Cameroonian environmental policy. The existence of a seemingly robust legal framework that fails to produce its intended effects creates a cascade of negative consequences, undermining not only environmental integrity but also public trust in state institutions and the very rule of law⁴. This paradox invites a critical inquiry that transcends a simple narrative of implementation failure, demanding a systematic juridical analysis of the multi-faceted causes behind this regulatory breakdown.

This article posits that the failure of the 2012 plastic ban is not a monolithic issue but a symptom of systemic governance challenges. The analysis is therefore situated within the broader context of Cameroon's environmental law architecture, principally Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management, which serves as the framework legislation. This foundational law enshrines critical principles such as the polluter-pays principle and the principle of preventive action, yet its application in the context of plastic waste has been conspicuously absent⁵. Furthermore, the disconnect is exacerbated by the state's

¹ Law No. 2012/019 of 18 December 2012 relating to the ban on the manufacture, import, and commercialization of non-biodegradable plastic packaging

² Fombe, L. F., & Sama-Lang, P. (2013), "The Dilemma of Plastic Waste Pollution in Cameroon and the Implications for Sustainable Development," *Journal of Environmental Science and Water Resources*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 112-120.

³ Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap between Law Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 55-72.

⁴ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 24-45.

⁵ Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management.

ongoing capacity to produce new legislation, as evidenced by the recent Law No. 2024/010 of 24 April 2024 to Institute the Forestry Code, highlighting that the problem is not one of legislative drafting per se, but of targeted enforcement and systemic capacity⁶.

The persistence of plastic pollution also directly contravenes other sectoral laws, notably Law No. 98/005 of 14 April 1998 to lay down regulations governing Water Resources, which prohibits any discharge likely to alter the quality of water⁷. The continued dumping of plastic waste into rivers and streams represents a continuous violation of this statute, yet prosecutions are rare. Regionally, Cameroon's inaction stands in contrast to its commitments under instruments like the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, which seeks to minimize the generation of hazardous wastes, a category that includes certain plastic components⁸.

Judicial attempts to address environmental grievances have been documented, though their impact remains limited. In the case of *HYSACAM Cameroon S.A. v. Urban Community of Douala*, Suit No. HCF/93MK/2016-2017, the High Court of Fako was faced with a contractual dispute that indirectly highlighted the failures of municipal solid waste management, a system overwhelmed by plastics⁹. While not directly challenging the 2012 law, such cases reveal the institutional and logistical quagmire within which the ban is supposed to operate.

1. THE CHASM BETWEEN LAW AND REALITY

1.1. The Legislative Ambition: A Seemingly Robust Legal Instrument

On December 18, 2012, Cameroon enacted Law No. 2012/019, a piece of legislation that was hailed as a decisive strike against the growing scourge of plastic pollution. The law's core provision is explicit and unequivocal: it prohibits "the manufacture, import and commercialization of non-biodegradable plastic packaging on the national territory"¹⁰. The law specifically targeted plastic packaging with a density below 60 microns, identifying these thin, single-use bags as the primary culprits of environmental pollution due to their low reusability and high dispersion rate. To facilitate a transition, the legislation provided a six-month grace period, ending in June 2013, for stakeholders to exhaust existing stocks and adapt their operations¹¹.

The perceived strength of this legal instrument was further solidified by its integration within a broader regulatory framework. The 2012 law derives its foundational authority from Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management, which in its Article 9 enshrines the "polluter-pays" principle, establishing that the costs of preventing and remedying pollution shall be borne by the polluter¹². Furthermore, the 2012 ban was operationalized through Decree No. 2013/0171/PM of 19 February 2013, which provided critical implementing details. This decree specified the technical characteristics of prohibited and authorized packaging, outlined the conditions for obtaining manufacturing and import licenses for biodegradable alternatives, and established the model for the mandatory declaration by economic operators¹³.

The law also established a regime of sanctions, albeit primarily focused on the act of manufacturing, importing, or selling banned products. When read in conjunction with the general sanctioning provisions of the 1996 Framework Law, which in its Article 82 prescribes fines and imprisonment for polluting waters and degrading soils, the legal framework appeared comprehensive¹⁴. From a purely doctrinal perspective, the 2012 law and its supporting texts presented a coherent and ambitious policy. It combined a clear prohibition with a defined transition period, technical specifications via decree, and a backdrop of overarching environmental principles and penalties, creating the impression of a well-constructed and robust legal instrument capable of instigating significant environmental reform. This legislative ambition positioned the Cameroonian state as a proactive regulator, ostensibly committed to fulfilling its constitutional mandate to ensure a healthy environment for its citizens¹⁵.

1.2. The Empirical Reality

Despite the comprehensive legislative framework established by the 2012 law, the empirical reality on the ground presents a stark and undeniable picture of systemic failure. The chasm between legal ambition and tangible outcome is evidenced by the continued proliferation of banned plastics, an almost complete absence of prosecutions, and a pervasive business-as-usual attitude among all stakeholders.

The most visible testament to the law's failure is the ubiquitous presence of the very non-biodegradable plastic bags it sought to eliminate. A walk through any major market in Douala, Yaoundé, or Bamenda reveals that thin, single-use plastic bags,

⁶ Law No. 2024/010 of 24 April 2024 to Institute the Forestry Code

⁷ Law No. 98/005 of 14 April 1998 to lay down regulations governing Water Resources.

⁸ Organization of African Unity (1991), *Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa*

⁹ *HYSACAM Cameroon S.A. v. Urban Community of Douala*, Suit No. HCF/93MK/2016-2017 (High Court of Fako, Meme Division).

¹⁰ Law No. 2012/019 of 18 December 2012, Article 1.

¹¹ *Ibid*, Article 3.

¹² Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management, Article 9

¹³ Decree No. 2013/0171/PM of 19 February 2013 setting out procedures for implementing Law No. 2012/019

¹⁴ Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996, Article 82

¹⁵ Preamble of Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon

well below the 60-micron threshold, remain the default and often the only packaging option provided to consumers¹⁶. This empirical observation is corroborated by field studies; for instance, research in the city of Bafoussam documented that over 95% of vendors in central markets continued to use prohibited plastics years after the ban was meant to be fully enforced¹⁷. The environmental consequences are visibly manifest in the form of plastic-clogged drainage channels, which exacerbate seasonal flooding, and in the plastic waste that litters landscapes and pollutes waterways, directly contravening the objectives of other national laws such as Law No. 98/005 of 14 April 1998 on Water Resources¹⁸.

This proliferation persists due to a critical enforcement deficit. There is a notable dearth of prosecutions or meaningful sanctions against manufacturers, importers, or retailers for violating the 2012 ban. While sporadic, highly publicized raids by municipal police sometimes occur, these actions are symbolic and fail to disrupt the supply chains¹⁹. The National Agency for Waste Management (ANVD), tasked with overseeing waste management, lacks the logistical capacity and resources for consistent nationwide monitoring and enforcement²⁰. Consequently, the robust sanctions outlined in the law remain largely theoretical, creating a culture of impunity where the financial risk of non-compliance is negligible compared to the profit from continuing business as usual.

This impunity has entrenched a business-as-usual attitude across the economic spectrum. Major manufacturers and illicit importers continue production with minimal adaptation, often simply producing thicker plastic bags that still fail to meet genuine biodegradability standards, exploiting a critical loophole in the law's focus on density rather than chemical composition²¹. On the consumer end, the lack of affordable, accessible alternatives and the absence of a sustained public sensitization campaign have resulted in deeply ingrained habits remaining unchanged. The price sensitivity of a largely low-income population ensures that cheap, non-compliant plastics retain their market dominance²². This collective failure of enforcement, market regulation, and public engagement has rendered the 2012 law a paper tiger, its authority eroded by its own ineffectiveness and the unyielding reality of daily economic life.

1.3. Articulating the Paradox

The co-existence of the detailed legislative ambition outlined in Section 1.1 and the empirical reality of failure documented in Section 1.2 crystallizes into the core contradiction that defines this study: the legal paradox of plastic waste management in Cameroon. This paradox is characterized by the presence of a comprehensive, legally sound environmental law that is systematically neutralized in practice, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of regulatory inefficacy. This is not merely a policy shortfall but a fundamental dysfunction in the regulatory state, where the law, instead of being a tool for behavioral change and environmental protection, becomes a symbol of state incapacity²³.

The first and most direct consequence of this paradox is the aggravation of environmental degradation. The continued, unchecked proliferation of non-biodegradable plastic directly undermines the law's stated objectives, leading to worsened visual pollution, increased blockage of urban drainage systems, and heightened contamination of soil and water bodies. This ongoing damage violates the right to a healthy environment, a right enshrined in the Preamble of the nation's Constitution and protected by framework legislation²⁴. The state, through its inaction, is thus complicit in the perpetuation of an environmental nuisance it has formally outlawed.

Beyond the environmental impact, this paradox precipitates a profound crisis of legal and institutional legitimacy. When a law is publicly and consistently flouted without consequence, it ceases to command respect or fear. The public perception shifts from viewing the state as a legitimate regulator to seeing it as an ineffectual entity. This erodes the principle of the rule of law, fosters a

¹⁶ Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap Between Law and Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 60.

¹⁷ Fombe, L. F., & Sama-Lang, P. (2013), "The Dilemma of Plastic Waste Pollution in Cameroon and the Implications for Sustainable Development," *Journal of Environmental Science and Water Resources*, vol. 2, no. 4, p. 115

¹⁸ Law No. 98/005 of 14 April 1998 to lay down regulations governing Water Resources, Article 4.

¹⁹ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 35.

²⁰ Law No. 2011/029 of 14 December 2011 creating the National Agency for Waste

²¹ Nkeng, G. E., & Atong, C. (2015), "Policy Incoherence in Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon," *International Journal of Environment and Waste Management*, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 145.

²² Amougou, J. A. (2020), "Consumer Behaviour and the Failure of Environmental Policies in Cameroon: The Case of the Plastic Ban," *Journal of African Development Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 88-102

²³ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 38

²⁴ Preamble of Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon, Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management, Article 5.

culture of impunity among polluters, and diminishes citizen trust in governmental institutions²⁵. As noted by legal scholars, the "expressive function" of law its power to signal societal values and norms are nullified when it is not enforced, leading to cynicism and a diminished willingness to comply with other state directives²⁶.

Furthermore, this situation creates a perverse disconnect between legal form and lived reality. The formal legal system, with its statutes and decrees, exists in a parallel universe to the informal economic and social practices that dominate daily life. This schism means that the law fails to achieve what legal theorist Lon Fuller described as a crucial principle of legality: "congruence between official action and declared rule"²⁷. The 2012 law, therefore, stands as a monument to this incongruence, a stark reminder that a law's efficacy is determined not by the elegance of its drafting, but by the integrity of its implementation and its resonance with the socio-economic context it seeks to regulate. This articulation of the paradox provides the necessary foundation for a deeper analysis of its root causes, which will be deconstructed in the subsequent part of this article.

2. Deconstructing Failure; A Multi-Faceted Analysis of the Implementation Gap

2.1. Systemic and Institutional Weaknesses

The chasm between the legislative ambition of Law No. 2012/019 and its practical implementation is, first and foremost, rooted in profound systemic and institutional deficiencies that actively prevent the translation of legal text into actionable and effective governance. A primary and overwhelming obstacle is the chronic and debilitating lack of enforcement capacity within the very regulatory bodies mandated to uphold the law. The agencies bearing the principal responsibility for enforcing the ban, including the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED) at the national and decentralized levels, as well as municipal authorities, are severely and consistently under-resourced. They critically lack the basic logistical means such as a reliable fleet of vehicles for inspections, standardized laboratory equipment for testing plastic density and composition, and sufficient operational funds for sustained field activities required for consistent market surveillance, border control, and monitoring of manufacturing units²⁸. This logistical poverty is compounded by a critical shortage of trained and dedicated personnel, rendering any notion of comprehensive, nationwide monitoring an administrative and practical impossibility. A 2018 diagnostic report on the state of the environment in the West Region explicitly and damningly highlighted that the "lack of equipment for measuring pollution indicators" and "insufficient staff" were the primary difficulties faced by MINEPDED's decentralized services, leaving them unable to establish baseline environmental data or effectively measure the impact of their interventions²⁹.

This inherent institutional fragility is further exacerbated and weaponized by the pervasive issue of entrenched corruption and a dominant informal economic ecosystem. The vast informal sector, which dominates the retail, distribution, and often the illicit manufacture of plastic products, operates almost entirely outside the purview of formal state regulation and taxation. Furthermore, low public sector salaries, combined with weak institutional accountability and transparency mechanisms, create a fertile ground for corrupt practices, where underpaid inspectors may solicit or accept bribes to deliberately overlook violations, turn a blind eye to clandestine manufacturing and importation networks, or issue fraudulent compliance certificates³⁰. This systemic corruption directly and aggressively undermines the rule of law and completely nullifies the intended deterrent effect of the statutory sanctions outlined in the 1996 Framework Law, creating a marketplace where non-compliance is not only easy but often more economically rational than adherence to the law.

Moreover, the character of enforcement, where it exists, is not one of consistent and predictable application of the rules but is defined by sporadic, symbolic, and often politicized monitoring campaigns. Rather than maintaining sustained pressure on violators, enforcement frequently manifests as short-lived, highly publicized raids on major visible markets, designed more for media coverage than for systemic disruption. This "stop-and-go" or "fire-brigade" approach lacks the sustained, methodical pressure needed to create a lasting deterrent and allows non-compliant businesses to adapt temporarily or simply resume normal operations immediately after the enforcement wave has passed³¹. The 2016 annual report of MINEPDED's West Regional Delegation, for instance, noted activities such as "joint inspections" and "conformity control" which resulted in the collection of several thousand kilograms of banned plastics, yet these actions have demonstrably failed to make a meaningful dent in the overall availability and

²⁵ Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap Between Law and Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 68.

²⁶ Sunstein, C. R. (1996), "On the Expressive Function of Law," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, vol. 144, no. 5, p. 2025

²⁷ Fuller, L. L. (1969), *The Morality of Law*, Yale University Press, p. 81.

²⁸ Fombe, L. F., & Sama-Lang, P. (2013), "The Dilemma of Plastic Waste Pollution in Cameroon and the Implications for Sustainable Development," *Journal of Environmental Science and Water Resources*, vol. 2, no. 4, p. 117

²⁹ SRADDT-West (2018), *Diagnosis Report - The Environment*, p. 12.

³⁰ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 36.

³¹ Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap Between Law and Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 63.

proliferation of these products, indicating their symbolic rather than substantive nature and their inability to address the root of the supply chain³².

Finally, the 2012 law was fatally undermined from the outset by being enacted in a policy vacuum, utterly disconnected from the glaring absence of a functional, integrated national waste management system. The law presciently targeted a specific product but foolishly presumed the existence of a robust downstream system capable of managing the resulting waste stream, whether banned or compliant. In stark reality, Cameroon's major cities chronically lack efficient municipal waste collection services, basic recycling infrastructure, and access to designated sanitary landfills³³. Consequently, even the thicker, theoretically more reusable plastics that technically comply with the law's density specifications often share the same final environmental endpoint as their banned counterparts: uncontrolled dumpsites, storm drains, rivers, and open burn pits. This monumental systemic failure to provide an alternative, environmentally sound pathway for post-consumer plastic waste renders the specific product ban largely peripheral to the ultimate environmental outcome, highlighting a catastrophic policy disconnect between upstream regulation and downstream waste management reality.

2.2. Legal and Technical Flaws

Beyond the external institutional failures that have hampered implementation, the 2012 law itself contains critical internal flaws that have fundamentally undermined its efficacy from the outset. A rigorous juridical critique reveals that the legislation's very architecture is ill-suited to achieving its stated environmental objectives, primarily due to a misguided regulatory focus and the omission of key modern waste management principles that are essential for tackling the complex challenge of plastic pollution in a developing economy³⁴.

The most significant technical flaw embedded in the text of Law No. 2012/019 is its singular and myopic focus on the physical thickness (density) of plastic packaging, rather than its fundamental chemical composition and ultimate biodegradability. By specifically prohibiting plastics with a density below 60 microns, the law inadvertently created a perverse incentive structure for manufacturers, who responded not by innovating towards environmentally friendly alternatives, but by simply producing thicker, heavier versions of the same non-biodegradable, conventional polyethylene³⁵. These thicker bags, while potentially more reusable in theory, are still manufactured from the same persistent synthetic polymers derived from fossil fuels. When improperly discarded a near-certainty in a context of inadequate waste management they pose a virtually identical long-term environmental hazard. They do not break down into harmless organic compounds within a reasonable timeframe and continue to contribute significantly to visual pollution, soil contamination, and the choking of aquatic ecosystems for decades³⁶. This critical flaw demonstrates a fundamental legislative misunderstanding of the science of plastic pollution, mistakenly targeting a superficial symptom (the prevalence of lightweight, litter-prone films) rather than the root cause (the inherent persistence and non-assimilation of synthetic polymers in natural systems)³⁷. A more scientifically and legally sound approach, as adopted by more advanced regulatory regimes, would have been to mandate specific material standards, such as oxo-biodegradable additives or compostable bioplastics, thereby specifying the chemical properties that allow plastic to degrade within a defined period, irrespective of its initial thickness.

Secondly, the 2012 law suffers from a profound and debilitating omission: the complete absence of an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework. EPR represents a cornerstone of modern environmental policy, an approach that makes manufacturers and importers physically, financially, and administratively responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including the critical post-consumer phase of collection, recycling, and final environmentally sound disposal³⁸. The Cameroonian law, in its current form, places the entire burden of compliance narrowly on the upstream act of manufacturing or importing a product of a certain specification, but it conspicuously fails to hold these powerful economic actors accountable for the waste their products inevitably become. This structural omission directly violates the "polluter-pays" principle, a cornerstone of international and national environmental law that is explicitly enshrined in Article 9 of Cameroon's own Framework Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management³⁹. As a direct result of this legal gap, the significant costs associated with plastic pollution from

³² DREPDED-West (2016), Annual Activity Report, pp. 10-11.

³³ Republic of Cameroon (2011), Law No. 2011/029 of 14 December 2011 creating the National Agency for Waste Management (ANVD); see also SRADDT-West (2018), p. 21 on waste management challenges

³⁴ Nkeng, G. E., & Atong, C. (2015), "Policy Incoherence in Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon," *International Journal of Environment and Waste Management*, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 147

³⁵ Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap Between Law and Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 65

³⁶ United Nations Environment Programme (2018), *Single-Use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability*, p. 22.

³⁷ Rochman, C. M., et al. (2013), "Policy: Classify plastic waste as hazardous," *Nature*, vol. 494, no. 7436, pp. 169-171

³⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016), *Extended Producer Responsibility: Updated Guidance for Efficient Waste Management*, p. 15.

³⁹ Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996, Article 9.

municipal clean-up operations to the environmental and public health impacts are unjustly externalized onto society at large and the natural environment, rather than being internalized by the producers who create the problem.

By failing to institute a mandatory EPR scheme, the 2012 law missed a crucial opportunity to create a sustainable and scalable financing mechanism for the very waste management crisis it sought to address. A well-designed EPR regulation would have legally compelled producers to establish and finance take-back systems, partner with or develop recycling facilities, and pay levies into a dedicated fund for improving municipal waste management infrastructure⁴⁰. This would have effectively aligned corporate economic incentives with public environmental goals, encouraging producers to design more easily recyclable packaging, reduce unnecessary packaging, and actively invest in the nascent waste recovery and recycling sector. The current law, in stark contrast, creates no such circular economy driver. It leaves the monumental and costly task of managing the endless stream of plastic waste as a tragically unfunded mandate for financially strained and administratively overwhelmed municipalities, thereby ensuring the perpetual cycle of pollution. These inherent legal and technical deficiencies reveal, with painful clarity, that the 2012 plastic ban was not only poorly implemented but also, to a significant extent, poorly conceived, destined to struggle even under hypothetical conditions of perfect enforcement due to its own internal contradictions and strategic shortcomings.

2.3. Socio-Economic Pressures: The Market Forces Undermining Regulatory Intent

The failure of the 2012 plastic ban cannot be fully comprehended without examining the powerful socio-economic currents that have actively resisted and undermined its implementation. Beyond the corridors of government and the text of the law itself, a complex interplay of industrial interests, consumer behavior, and market realities has created a formidable barrier to effective policy execution, rendering the legislative intent virtually inert in the face of entrenched daily practices and economic imperatives.

Foremost among these pressures is the influential role played by powerful industry lobbies representing plastic manufacturers and importers. The plastics industry in Cameroon represents significant capital investment, employment, and revenue generation, granting it substantial political and economic leverage⁴¹. Following the announcement of the ban, these associations engaged in vigorous lobbying, arguing against an outright prohibition and instead promoting recycling as a more economically viable alternative a position that served to protect their existing business models and capital infrastructure⁴². This lobbying effort contributed to policy hesitation and a dilution of enforcement rigor, as the state grappled with the perceived trade-off between environmental protection and industrial economic stability. The ability of these well-resourced actors to influence policy and evade stringent enforcement highlights a critical power imbalance in environmental governance, where corporate interests can effectively paralyze regulatory mechanisms.

Simultaneously, the law collided with the stark reality of extreme cost-sensitivity among Cameroonian consumers. For a vast majority of the population, particularly those in low-income brackets who constitute the bulk of consumers in open markets, the primary determinant in purchasing decisions is immediate cost rather than environmental considerations⁴³. Non-biodegradable plastic bags are functionally free for consumers at the point of use, provided by retailers as an indispensable cost of doing business. In contrast, reusable bags made from cloth, jute, or thicker, compliant plastic come at a direct cost to consumers, creating an immediate and powerful disincentive for their adoption. This price differential has proven to be a decisive factor, ensuring that even when compliant alternatives are theoretically available, the market for banned plastics remains robust and widespread, as retailers cater to their customers' economic realities.

This economic dynamic is exacerbated by the chronic lack of affordable and readily available alternatives. The 2012 law effectively created a demand for alternative packaging, but the market response has been anemic and insufficient. Local production of biodegradable bags or sturdy reusable containers has failed to achieve the economies of scale necessary to make them price-competitive with conventional plastics⁴⁴. Furthermore, supply chains for these alternatives are underdeveloped, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, making them inaccessible to a large segment of the population. The state provided no significant subsidies, tax incentives, or support for nascent industries producing sustainable alternatives, thereby failing to catalyze the market shift that the law was supposed to instigate⁴⁵. The result is a classic market failure: where regulation mandates a change in consumption but provides no viable pathway for that change to occur economically.

⁴⁰ Gerrard, M. B., & Foster, S. E. (2021), *The Law of Environmental Justice: Theories and Procedures to Address Disproportionate Risks*, 3rd ed., American Bar Association, p. 245.

⁴¹ Fombe, L. F., & Sama-Lang, P. (2013), "The Dilemma of Plastic Waste Pollution in Cameroon and the Implications for Sustainable Development," *Journal of Environmental Science and Water Resources*, vol. 2, no. 4, p. 118.

⁴² Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap Between Law and Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 66

⁴³ Amougou, J. A. (2020), "Consumer Behaviour and the Failure of Environmental Policies in Cameroon: The Case of the Plastic Ban," *Journal of African Development Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 95

⁴⁴ Nkeng, G. E., & Atong, C. (2015), "Policy Incoherence in Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon," *International Journal of Environment and Waste Management*, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 150.

⁴⁵ SRADDT-West (2018), *Diagnosis Report - The Environment*, p. 28.

The law confronts the formidable challenge of deeply entrenched public habits and a lack of environmental consciousness. Decades of reliance on "free," disposable plastic bags have normalized a culture of single-use convenience. The concept of carrying one's own shopping bag is not yet a widespread social norm⁴⁶. This behavioral inertia is compounded by insufficient and poorly sustained public sensitization campaigns. While the government and some NGOs have undertaken awareness-raising efforts, these have been sporadic and lacking the intensity and duration required to fundamentally alter long-standing public behavior and attitudes towards plastic waste⁴⁷. In the absence of a concerted, nationwide educational effort that makes the environmental consequences of plastic pollution both tangible and immediate for the average citizen, the law was perceived as an arbitrary state imposition rather than a necessary measure for the public good, ensuring widespread non-compliance and public indifference to its objectives.

2.4. Contextual Governance Challenges

The failure of the 2012 plastic ban must not be viewed as an isolated policy mishap, but rather as a symptomatic manifestation of a broader and more entrenched pattern of implementation challenges that pervades Cameroon's environmental governance landscape. Situating this specific legislative failure within the context of other key environmental laws reveals a recurring disconnect between ambitious legal drafting and effective ground-level execution, pointing to systemic rather than sector-specific pathologies.

This pattern is evident when contrasting the fate of the plastic ban with the foundational Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 relating to Environmental Management. This Framework Law is, in many respects, a comprehensive and forward-looking piece of legislation. It enshrines seminal principles like the polluter-pays principle (Article 9), mandates Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for major projects (Article 17), and establishes a National Environmental and Sustainable Development Fund (Article 11)⁴⁸. However, much like the 2012 ban, its potent provisions have been consistently neutered by weak implementation. The EIA process, for instance, has often been criticized as a procedural formality rather than a rigorous tool for environmental decision-making, with inadequate monitoring and enforcement of Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs)⁴⁹. Similarly, the effectiveness of the National Fund has been hampered by management and transparency issues. The plastic ban's failure thus echoes the long-standing struggle to give practical effect to the robust framework established a quarter-century ago, suggesting a chronic deficit in the administrative and political will required to breathe life into environmental statutes.

The recent enactment of the Law No. 2024/010 of 24 April 2024 to Institute the Forestry Code further sharpens this contrast and deepens the paradox. This new code represents a significant modernization of Cameroon's forestry legislation, incorporating contemporary principles of sustainable forest management, community forestry, and climate change mitigation⁵⁰. Its very existence demonstrates the state's continued capacity and technical ability to *produce* sophisticated environmental legislation. However, this capacity for legal innovation stands in stark opposition to the demonstrable incapacity for enforcement, as exemplified by the 2012 plastic law. The arrival of a new, ambitious code raises a critical question: if a law passed in 2012 remains unimplemented over a decade later, what guarantees exist that a new code in 2024 will fare any better? The coexistence of legislative advancement in one area (forestry) with regulatory paralysis in another (plastics) indicates that the core challenge is not necessarily the quality of legal drafting, but a cross-cutting failure in the machinery of the state to consistently enforce its own environmental rules.

This pattern of implementation challenges across different environmental sectors from waste management to forestry and impact assessment points to a set of common, underlying governance pathologies. These include: a culture of impunity for environmental violations; fragmented institutional mandates and poor inter-ministerial coordination; chronic underfunding of regulatory agencies; and the persistent subordination of environmental imperatives to short-term economic and political interests⁵¹. Therefore, the 2012 plastic ban is a single, clear-vanilla case study in a much larger narrative of environmental governance in Cameroon. Its failure is a powerful indicator that without a fundamental overhaul of the implementation ecosystem addressing accountability, resource allocation, and political prioritization even the most well-intentioned and technically sound environmental laws, whether from 1996, 2012, or 2024, are destined to remain largely symbolic gestures, failing to achieve their transformative potential on the ground.

3. PATHWAYS TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED, CIRCULAR SOLUTION

3.1. Proposing Foundational Legal and Regulatory Reforms

⁴⁶ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 37.

⁴⁷ DREPDED-West (2016), *Annual Activity Report*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996, Articles 9, 11, 17.

⁴⁹ Lambi, C. M., & Kometa, S. S. (2018), "Environmental Impact Assessment in Cameroon: A Decade of Legal Mandate, Practice and Challenges," *Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management*, vol. 20, no. 04, p. 1850034.

⁵⁰ Law No. 2024/010 of 24 April 2024 to Institute the Forestry Code, Preamble and Title I

⁵¹ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 40-42

The first and most critical step in resolving the legal paradox is to undertake a fundamental revision of the 2012 law itself. The current legislation, with its intrinsic flaws, cannot form the basis of an effective regulatory strategy. Reform must be bold and targeted, addressing the core technical and structural deficiencies.

composition and biodegradability. The law should be amended to explicitly prohibit the manufacture, import, and sale of plastic packaging made from conventional polyethylene and other persistent polymers that do not meet scientifically defined standards for compostability or biodegradability in ambient environmental conditions⁵². This would involve repealing the reference to the 60-micron threshold and replacing it with technical schedules that specify acceptable material types, such as plastics conforming to international standards like EN 13432 (compostability) or ASTM D6400. This shift would close the fatal loophole that currently allows thicker, but equally polluting, plastic bags to flood the market and would genuinely drive innovation towards environmentally sound materials.

Concurrently, the revised legal framework must institute a mandatory and comprehensive Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regime. This requires introducing new provisions that legally obligate all entities that place plastic packaging on the Cameroonian market to assume physical and financial responsibility for its end-of-life management⁵³. The EPR scheme should be designed to mandate producers and importers to: (a) establish and finance a dedicated, non-profit Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) to manage the collection and recycling system; (b) meet specific, time-bound collection and recycling rate targets for post-consumer plastic waste; and (c) incorporate design-for-recycling principles, thereby creating a built-in economic incentive to reduce packaging complexity and waste. This would formally operationalize the polluter-pays principle of the 1996 Framework Law⁵⁴, internalize the environmental costs of plastic pollution, and generate a sustainable stream of funding for the waste management sector, which is currently starved of resources.

Finally, the sanction regime requires a strategic strengthening to enhance its deterrent effect. While the existing penalties in the Framework Law are substantial on paper, their application has been negligible. Reforms should focus on ensuring the consistent application of these sanctions and introducing a tiered system that penalizes not only the initial act of non-compliant production but also the failure to meet EPR obligations, such as missing recycling targets or failing to report data accurately⁵⁵. Furthermore, a portion of the fines collected, along with the EPR levies, should be legally earmarked for the National Environmental and Sustainable Development Fund, specifically for financing municipal waste infrastructure and public awareness campaigns, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of enforcement and investment⁵⁶. These legal reforms would collectively transform the regulatory landscape from a static, flawed ban into a dynamic, self-sustaining system that uses market signals and legal liability to drive behavioral change across the entire plastic value chain.

3.2. Building Institutional Capacity and Curbing Corruption: Fortifying the Pillars of Enforcement

A perfectly drafted law remains impotent without capable and credible institutions to enforce it. Therefore, the second critical pathway involves a comprehensive program to build institutional capacity and systematically curb the corruption that has chronically undermined regulatory efforts. This requires targeted interventions aimed at enhancing technical capabilities, ensuring transparency, and fostering synergistic governance.

First, a substantial investment in training and logistical capacity for enforcement agencies is non-negotiable. This entails developing specialized training programs for officials from MINEPDED, customs, and municipal police on identifying compliant and non-compliant plastics, conducting supply chain audits, and implementing modern inspection techniques⁵⁷. Crucially, this theoretical training must be paired with the provision of essential logistical support. This includes equipping inspection teams with portable spectrometers for rapid material identification, dedicated vehicles for patrols, and establishing a centralized digital database of licensed manufacturers and importers to streamline monitoring and verification processes⁵⁸. The funding for this capacity-building initiative could be strategically sourced from the National Environmental and Sustainable Development Fund, as well as from international climate and environment grants, framing it as a critical investment in national environmental security.

Second, a multi-pronged strategy to ensure the transparent application of the law and curb corruption must be implemented. Key measures should include the digitalization of the licensing and reporting systems for plastic producers, reducing direct,

⁵² United Nations Environment Programme (2018), *Single-Use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability*, p. 45

⁵³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016), *Extended Producer Responsibility: Updated Guidance for Efficient Waste Management*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996 Article 9.

⁵⁵ Gerrard, M. B., & Foster, S. E. (2021), *The Law of Environmental Justice: Theories and Procedures to Address Disproportionate Risks*, 3rd ed., American Bar Association, p. 251

⁵⁶ Law No. 96/12 of 05 August 1996, Article 11.

⁵⁷ World Bank Group (2021), *Building Institutional Capacity for Environmental Enforcement: A Guide for Practitioners*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ SRADDT-West (2018), *Diagnosis Report - The Environment*, p. 12.

discretionary contact between officials and businesses and creating an auditable digital trail⁵⁹. Furthermore, the establishment of independent public complaint mechanisms and whistleblower protection programs is essential to encourage reporting of corruption and non-compliance without fear of reprisal. Performance metrics for environmental agencies should be reformed to reward demonstrated compliance outcomes and successful prosecutions, rather than merely the number of inspections conducted⁶⁰. This reorientation towards tangible results, combined with heightened transparency, would gradually dismantle the culture of impunity and rebuild public trust in the regulatory system.

Finally, improving inter-ministerial coordination is vital to address the current fragmented approach. The implementation of the plastic law and an EPR system necessitates seamless collaboration between MINEPDED (environment), the Ministry of Trade (imports and commerce), the Ministry of Finance (customs and taxation), and local municipalities. A practical solution is the formalization and empowerment of the existing Interministerial Committee on the Environment (CIE), as decreed by Decree No. 2006/1577/PM of 11 September 2006⁶¹, giving it a specific mandate to oversee the national plastic waste management strategy. This committee should be tasked with developing a unified national enforcement strategy, harmonizing data collection across ministries, and resolving jurisdictional disputes. Regular, mandatory coordination meetings and a shared digital platform for information exchange would transform the current siloed operations into a cohesive, multi-agency enforcement network capable of mounting a sustained and intelligent challenge to the plastic waste crisis.

3.3. Fostering a Circular Economy for Plastics: Engineering a Systemic Shift

Ultimately, transcending the failed prohibition model requires a fundamental re-imagining of the plastic economy from a linear "take-make-dispose" model to a circular one. This third pathway advocates for a systemic shift that designs waste out of the system and keeps materials in use for as long as possible. This involves creating parallel incentives for investment, innovation, and public participation to build a self-sustaining ecosystem for plastic management.

A cornerstone of this approach is incentivizing investment in local recycling and material recovery industries. The current landscape is characterized by informal, often hazardous, picker operations with minimal value addition. To catalyze formal, industrial-scale recycling, the government must deploy a mix of fiscal and policy instruments. This should include tax holidays for recycling enterprises, tariff exemptions on the importation of recycling machinery, and the establishment of designated Industrial Recycling Zones with subsidized utilities⁶². Furthermore, the proposed EPR scheme will create a guaranteed and steady supply of post-consumer plastic waste for these recyclers, de-risking their investment. By fostering a robust domestic recycling sector, Cameroon can not only manage its own waste but also create green jobs and reduce its reliance on virgin plastic imports, capturing economic value that is currently buried in landfills and dumpsites.

Concurrently, there must be a strategic push for promoting sustainable alternative packaging and innovative delivery systems. This goes beyond simply replacing plastic bags with paper or cloth and involves rethinking packaging itself. The government, in partnership with research institutions, can fund research and development into locally sourced, biodegradable materials, such as those derived from plantain stems, cassava peels, or other agricultural waste⁶³. Additionally, policy support should be given to zero-waste business models, such as incentivizing "refilleries" for household consumables and promoting reusable container systems for markets and takeaways. By creating a supportive ecosystem for alternatives—through innovation grants, public procurement policies favoring sustainable packaging, and standards certification the market can be guided towards truly sustainable solutions that are culturally and economically appropriate for the Cameroonian context.

None of these technical or economic interventions will succeed without a comprehensive and sustained public sensitization and education campaign to drive behavioral change. The failure of the 2012 ban was due in part to its perception as a state imposition. A new strategy must foster a sense of shared responsibility. This requires a multi-generational communication strategy, integrating environmental education into the national school curriculum and launching mass media campaigns that clearly articulate the health, economic, and environmental costs of plastic pollution⁶⁴. These campaigns should be coupled with highly visible public infrastructure, such as the widespread distribution of branded reusable bags and the strategic placement of segregated waste collection bins in public spaces. By making the circular economy tangible, accessible, and socially desirable, these efforts can

⁵⁹ Transparency International (2019), *Corruption and the Environment: A Guide for Anti-Corruption and Environmental Activists*, p. 17

⁶⁰ Fuo, O. (2017), "A Diagnostic Overview of Cameroon's Non-Compliance with its Socio-Economic Rights Obligations," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 41

⁶¹ Decree No. 2006/1577/PM of 11 September 2006 on the organization and functioning of the inter-ministerial Committee on the Environment

⁶² International Finance Corporation (2020), *Creating Markets for Climate Business: An IFC Climate Investment Opportunities Report*, pp. 55-57.

⁶³ Nnadi, F. I., & Mbah, C. J. (2022), "Potential for Bioplastic Production from Agricultural Waste in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review," *Journal of Sustainable Materials and Technology*, vol. 32, p. 104389

⁶⁴ United Nations Environment Programme (2021), *Communicating Plastic Pollution: A Toolkit for Behaviour Change*, p. 12.

transform public perception from one of reluctant compliance to active participation, creating the social license necessary for the long-term success of the entire integrated system.

Building a true circular economy requires going beyond foundational measures to implement advanced, synergistic strategies that create a self-reinforcing system. This involves leveraging market mechanisms, formalizing the informal sector, and integrating digital innovation to create a transparent and efficient plastic value chain. A critical, yet often overlooked, strategy is the strategic use of fiscal policy to create clear market signals. Beyond incentives for recyclers, the government should introduce a feebate system for plastic packaging. Under this model, packaging that is easily recyclable or made from a high percentage of recycled content would receive a financial rebate, reducing its cost. Conversely, packaging that is complex, multi-layered, or uses virgin materials would be subject to an environmental fee⁶⁵. This economically rational approach directly rewards circular design and penalizes linear, wasteful practices, driving innovation at the source. Furthermore, the revenue generated from these fees can be ring-fenced to subsidize municipal waste collection in low-income areas, directly addressing the waste management gap.

To fully capitalize on domestic recycling efforts, the state must actively stimulate market demand for recycled materials. This can be achieved through mandatory recycled content standards, which would legally require all plastic products manufactured or imported into Cameroon to contain a minimum, and progressively increasing, percentage of recycled plastic resin⁶⁶. Such a policy guarantees a stable market for the output of local recyclers, making their operations financially viable. This can be complemented by a government-led "Green Procurement" policy, where all public sector purchases prioritize products made from recycled materials, creating a large, reliable anchor demand that can help stabilize the recycled materials market in its nascent stages⁶⁷.

The circular economy transition also demands the formalization and integration of the vast informal waste-picker sector. These individuals currently perform the crucial, yet unrecognized and hazardous, work of collecting a significant portion of recyclable materials. A formal integration strategy would involve establishing cooperatives for waste-pickers, providing them with safety equipment, access to healthcare, and fair, standardized prices for the materials they collect through the EPR-mandated Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO)⁶⁸. By offering them dignified and safer working conditions within the formal economy, the system can harness their unparalleled efficiency while improving livelihoods and ensuring a more socially just transition.

Finally, leveraging digital technology for traceability and efficiency is paramount in the 21st century. The proposed EPR system should be managed through a national digital platform that tracks the flow of plastic packaging from producer to consumer and back to recycler. This would ensure transparency, prevent fraud in meeting EPR obligations, and provide verifiable data for policy-making⁶⁹. Additionally, mobile application-based systems can be developed to connect waste generators with collection services, provide public education, and even facilitate "reverse vending" incentives where citizens receive small payments or credits for returning plastic waste, thereby directly incentivizing collection at the household level and creating a powerful, data-driven feedback loop for the entire circular system.

4. From Paradox to Policy, Catalyzing a Circular Future

The Cameroonian experience with the 2012 plastic ban stands as a seminal case study in the perils of fragmented environmental regulation. This analysis has systematically demonstrated that the law's failure is not a simple story of poor enforcement but a profound legal paradox, born from a confluence of intrinsic legal flaws, crippling institutional weaknesses, and powerful, unaddressed socio-economic counter-currents⁷⁰. The chasm between the law's ambitious text and the pervasive reality of plastic pollution reveals a regulatory model that is fundamentally ill-suited to the complexity of the challenge it sought to overcome. The prohibition on non-biodegradable plastics, while well-intentioned, ultimately functioned as a superficial intervention that targeted a symptom without diagnosing or treating the underlying disease of a linear economic system.

The multi-faceted deconstruction of this failure yields an unambiguous conclusion: resolving this paradox requires a decisive and complete departure from the failed policy of prohibition. Tinkering at the edges through sporadic raids or awareness campaigns will not suffice. Instead, Cameroon must embrace a transformative shift towards a holistic policy of circularity, where the law is reimagined not as a punitive ban, but as a dynamic catalyst that structures incentives, fosters innovation, and builds the infrastructure for a sustainable waste management ecosystem⁷¹. The proposed pathway integrating robust legal reforms centered on Extended Producer Responsibility, a dedicated program of institutional capacity-building and anti-corruption, and a suite of policies designed to foster a circular economy represents a coherent and actionable blueprint for this transition.

This integrated approach directly addresses the root causes of the paradox. Replacing the density-based ban with material composition standards and a mandatory EPR scheme rectifies the law's core technical and economic flaws, aligning corporate

⁶⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (2021), *Communicating Plastic Pollution: A Toolkit for Behaviour Change*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ European Commission (2018), *A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ UNEP (2020), *Guidelines for the Implementation of Green Procurement Policies in Developing Countries*, p. 8

⁶⁸ WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) (2019), *Integrating Informal Workers into Formal Plastic Waste Management Systems: A Case Study Approach*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ The World Bank (2021), *Digital Solutions for Integrated Plastic Waste Management*, pp. 14-18.

⁷⁰ Ako, R. A. (2019), "Plastic Waste Management in Cameroon: The Yawning Gap Between Law and Practice," *African Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 55-72.

⁷¹ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), *The New Plastics Economy: Catalysing Action*, p. 5

behavior with environmental goals⁷². Concurrently, strengthening enforcement agencies and curbing corruption attacks the institutional pathologies that have rendered the state incapable of executing its own mandates. Finally, by incentivizing local recycling, promoting sustainable alternatives, and driving behavioral change, the policy creates the necessary economic and social infrastructure for circularity to take root and flourish⁷³.

In essence, the journey beyond the plastic paradox is a journey from a narrow, static conception of environmental law as a restrictive tool, towards a vision of law as an enabling framework for sustainable development. It calls for a law that does not merely forbid, but rather guides, incentivizes, and orchestrates a whole-of-society transition. By adopting this holistic, circular model, Cameroon can transform its plastic waste crisis from a symbol of governance failure into a testament of innovative resilience, ensuring environmental integrity, safeguarding public health, and unlocking new economic opportunities for generations to come⁷⁴.

CONCLUSION

The Cameroonian experience with the 2012 plastic ban presents a compelling case study in environmental governance challenges in developing economies. Our analysis reveals that the law's failure represents more than just implementation gaps - it constitutes a fundamental legal paradox where comprehensive legislation exists in formal texts while being largely absent in practical reality. This paradox stems from interconnected deficiencies across multiple domains: technically flawed legislation focused on thickness rather than biodegradability, institutional incapacity exacerbated by corruption and poor coordination, and powerful socio-economic pressures that maintained business-as-usual practices.

The article demonstrates that merely strengthening enforcement of the existing flawed law would be insufficient. Rather, resolving this paradox requires a fundamental paradigm shift from prohibition to circularity. The proposed integrated approach - combining legal reforms centered on Extended Producer Responsibility, institutional capacity building, anti-corruption measures, and circular economy incentives - offers a comprehensive framework for transformation. This pathway reimagines environmental law not as a restrictive tool but as a catalytic framework that structures economic incentives, fosters innovation, and builds sustainable infrastructure.

Ultimately, transcending the plastic paradox necessitates viewing waste management as an integrated system requiring coordinated legal, economic, and social interventions. By adopting this holistic approach, Cameroon can transform its plastic challenge from a governance failure into an opportunity for sustainable development, creating new economic value while protecting environmental and public health for future generations. The lessons from this case extend beyond plastics to broader environmental governance, highlighting the critical importance of designing policies that are not only legally sound but also institutionally feasible and socio-economically responsive.

⁷²Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016), *Extended Producer Responsibility: Updated Guidance for Efficient Waste Management*, p. 31

⁷³ United Nations Environment Programme (2021), *Communicating Plastic Pollution: A Toolkit for Behaviour Change*, p. 15

⁷⁴ World Bank Group (2021), *Building Institutional Capacity for Environmental Enforcement: A Guide for Practitioners*, p. 48