

LIFE STORIES

Saving the planet can be very complicated. How do you know whether something you do or buy will damage the environment? One way is to think about the 'life history' of anything you buy or use. Where has this thing come from? How was it made? Did it pollute the environment? What will happen to it when I have finished using it? Will it damage wildlife? Or litter the place where I live? Is it harmful to livestock or to humans?



Bahati is a basket. She was grown and harvested sustainably. The reeds to make her were cut from a beautiful lake. Reeds are replanted to ensure there will always be reeds to make baskets. The basket is woven by a skillful woman. Then Bahati is bought as a present by an aunty for her niece, Tamsin. All her life the girl uses the basket to do her shopping. As an old woman, she is still using the baskets. Even if the basket breaks, because it is made of natural materials, it is biodegradable. It will disappear in the environment safely, doing no harm. Perfect!



Pili the plastic bag is different. She was made at a factory using polluting chemicals and fossil fuels which damage the air and water. Very few human skills were used in making it. The money to buy it goes to a big company designed to make a few people wealthy rather than directly to an individual craftsperson. Pili is given to a shopper who uses it once and then throws it in the bin. When he is old, he will be surrounded by more bags than happiness! If the bag escapes his bin, it may end up suffocating a cow or goat who eats it by accident, killing fish, birds or harming a wild animal entangled in its non-biodegradable fibre. It never disappears but remains forever ugly and damaging to the world.

One salvation for the plastic bag may be to be woven into strong and reusable bags and hats such as in the So Afr-Eco Women's Project in South Africa.

