

Meeting the Challenge of E-waste in Africa

E-waste in Africa: from Waste to Resource Recovery

E-waste and end-of-life electric and electronic equipment generated locally or imported from other countries remain piled or are burned in open dumpsites in a number of African countries. Entire communities are exposed to this waste which, if not disposed of in a sound manner, can release dangerous substances in the environment and affect the health of local communities living in its vicinity. E-waste contains toxic substances such as lead, cadmium, mercury or brominated flame retardants. But e-waste is also a resource and some of these substances, as well as valuable parts, could be recycled and re-used providing economic opportunities through the development of community based collection, recovery and recycling businesses.

Goals

The e-waste Africa project, which is being implemented in the framework the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, is a comprehensive programme of activities aiming at enhancing environmental governance of e-wastes and at creating favorable social and economic conditions for partnerships and small businesses in the recycling sector in Africa.

The project is composed of four components:

1. Under a first component, a fact-finding study on flows in used and end-of-life e-products imported into five West African countries by land and by sea, in particular from European countries would be carried out. Local personnel would be trained by international experts and associated to the undertaking of the field research and collection of data. Investigations at exporting ports in Europe would also be carried out. The five African countries include Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria.
2. On the basis of the results from the first component, and the volume and type of imported end-of-life e-products and the re-export in the sub-region, two importing countries would be selected for the undertaking of national assessments of used and end-of-life e-equipment and the preparation of national environmentally sound management plans. The country assessments would encompass the description and assessment of e-waste management practices in the formal and the informal sector, including economic and social impacts, potential impact to human health and the environment, an assessment of needs to ensure environmentally sound management, and a detailed description of the legal and regulatory infrastructures in place. The results of the country assessments would be shared with national multi-stakeholder groups composed of governmental officials, representatives from the recycling sector, and the civil society and would be used for the preparation of national e-waste management plans.

3. An in-depth socio-economic study on the functioning and the sustainability impacts of the e-waste sector in Nigeria would be prepared. The focus would be on both the positive and negative impacts, including the identification of meaningful improvement options in environmental, social and economic terms. The feasibility of international co-operations between African SMEs and European recycling companies by combining their specific competitive advantages in e-waste disassembly and material recovery would be explored. From the findings, recommendations with a view to developing new market niches for the African e-waste recycling sector would be formulated.
4. An enforcement programme for key importing states, which are Benin, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria and Tunisia, on the monitoring and control of transboundary movements of used and end-of-life e-equipment and the prevention of illegal traffic would be implemented. A training curriculum aimed at port and customs authorities, governmental officials and accreditation authorities would be developed by specialized institutions. The curriculum would address tools for customs control, characterization and classification of used and end-of-life e-equipment, institutional coordination, regulatory framework development, and criteria for the ESM of used and end-of-life e-equipment. In the context of a collaborative effort, the project would propose measures for the prevention and control of exports from Europe to Africa of used and end-of-life e-products, and would facilitate the training of enforcement officers from African countries in Europe and the development of a scheme for exchanging information on end-of-life e-equipment between exporting and importing states.

The project is implemented by the Basel Convention Coordinating Centre based in Nigeria and the Basel Convention Regional Centre based in Senegal in cooperation with partners including: EMPA, Öko Institut, IMPEL, UNESCO and the Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment (PACE).

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