



Electronic waste : A rapidly growing global waste stream with detrimental effects on the environment and public health fueling climate change. Is the African continent safe

The demand for cheaper second-hand Electrical and Electronic Equipment (EEE) is increasing in Africa in part due to technological advancements, changing consumer behaviour and improving purchasing power. In more advanced economies, the lifespan of EEE has shortened resulting in early discarding. Discarded EEE often ends up in developing regions like Africa, where many of the citizens rely more on cheaper, refurbished electronic gadgets. More than 60% of the EEE that reaches the African continent is unusable and beyond repair and is classifiable as e-waste. As such, while Africa generates the least amount of e-waste in the world, over 80% of the EEE that ends up on the continent comes from developed countries. The growing concern is that, increasingly, e-waste is illegally exported to a continent where many countries lack the ability to safely manage and dispose of it. In Africa, e-waste is often discarded in open dumpsites where informal workers, the majority who are children and youths, salvage valuable materials under unsafe conditions. At worst, the e-waste is openly burned resulting in further environmental and public health risks. This calls for immediate action to reduce the impact of e-waste on the African continent.

Thematic focus and Presenters

- Policy, governance and regulations in the management of Electronic waste in Africa
Presented by : Dr V Maphosa – Lupane State University/ Internet Society Zimbabwe
- Electronic waste management principles in High Income Countries and impact on the African continent
Presented by : Zane G. T Cooper and Lauren Bridges – CARGC – USA
- Electronic waste and the environment
Presented by : Dr M Macherera – Lupane State University - Zimbabwe
- Electronic waste and climate change

Presented by : Dr Dorcas S Shumba - ACIDI - University of Cape Town – South Africa

- Public health burden of electronic waste

Presented by : Mr David Zezai – Zimbabwe Youth SDGs - Zimbabwe

Outcomes

The conversation which was meant to proffer solutions made the following recommendations to decision-makers on the African continent :

1. Setup inter-sectoral technical committees involving Government agencies, Research and Academic institutions, ICT service providers, NGOs and the general public to lead e-waste policy development and implementation
2. Promote international cooperation and technical assistance for capacity building, e.g., the Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects for infrastructure support.
3. E-waste management policies must be developed in close and ongoing consultation with affected communities through multistakeholder engagement to promote ownership and effective implementation of projects.
4. Set up tech monitoring models that account for waste produced in the tech supply chain – from mines to take-back schemes.
5. Incorporate the circular economy and life cycle approaches to the design of systems, process, and product design to simultaneously reduce the potential for GHG and hazardous chemical releases (as well as other negative environmental externalities) associated with provisioning of goods and services to meet societal needs
6. The health sector must play a role by providing leadership and advocacy, conducting research, influencing policymakers, engaging communities, and reaching out to other sectors to demand that health concerns be made central to e-waste policies.
7. Strengthen national training and empowerment efforts in better e-waste management, facilitating interventions, and developing more reliable regional and national statistics.
8. Develop legislation that limits the importation of used electronic devices from western countries and potentially reduce or monitor e-waste accumulation.
9. Ensure environmentally sound disposal of e-waste and the health and safety of workers through proper governance models.

10. Countries should be responsible for providing an adequate system of laws, controls, and administrative procedures for managing hazardous waste.

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