

Where does Africa stand on the global e-waste issue?

Side event at 2013 COPs and ExCOPs: Ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the conferences of the parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, 28 April to 10 May 2013

E-Waste in Africa and other emerging markets is posing a challenge as well as a significant opportunity. E-waste is a valuable resource for the re-use and secondary raw material markets. Processing and disposing of e-waste incorrectly can be a human health and environmental hazard.

The E-waste Solutions Alliance for Africa features Dell, HP, Nokia, and Phillips and recycler Reclaimed Appliances (UK) Ltd. Participants to the alliance, with several years' experience in building extended producer responsibility systems, have developed a set of principles which are critical in the success of managing e-waste in many developing countries.

Growth in population, consumption and e-waste

Africa is growing and is expected to have 3.6 B inhabitants by 2050. Electronics consumption is accelerating for new and second hand products and this is helping to bridge the digital divide. However, eventually all electrical and electronic products, will become e-waste. In 2010, 50-85 percent of e-waste generated in Africa has been generated domestically, equating to 650,000–1,000,000 tonnes of e-waste per annum. By 2017 Africa could generate more e-waste than EU.

The E-waste Solutions Alliance for Africa's vision

- E-waste is a valuable resource and recycling e-waste presents economic opportunities, and the creation of green jobs, new businesses and investment
- Collection of e-waste is not a problem as many people are currently working in informal e-waste collection and recycling in African countries, but health and environmental standards are poor
- South Africa and Kenya are currently the only countries in Africa that have established recycling facilities to approved international health, safety and environmental standards
- While any system should adhere to international health, safety and environmental standards, there is not a uniform „one size fits all“ approach to e-waste management, and systems should consider local conditions
- Regional approaches will be required to service the entire continent of Africa, to ensure effective e-waste management and efficient processing.

The E-waste Solutions Alliance for Africa's principles

Extended Producer Responsibility: The collection and recovery of e-waste makes business sense, however, some products may contain problematic fractions that have a negative value where their collection and treatment cost outweighs revenue through proper treatment. Critical to any regulation is a clear definition of all the obligated parties to ensure regulation addresses all economic actors, is fully enforceable and practical.

Fair Competition: Legislation should also allow for multiple recycling solutions to be established to encourage competition. Recycling facilities should be set up and operated by market players in a free and competitive environment. This will ensure that recyclers are constantly innovating, adding value to a country recycling market and ensuring cost efficient compliance.

Recycling Standards: The primary hazardous nature of e-waste resides in the improper treatment, not in the collection. Government should be responsible for overseeing a recycler approval process and make it mandatory that all e-waste collected be treated by approved recycling facilities operating to high environmental, health and safety standards. Such obligation is key to the success of any e-waste solution.

Informal Sector Involvement: In most African countries, there exists a network of informal collectors actively engaged in the collection and recycling of e-waste. Involvement of this informal sector is very important for the creation of a sustainable e-waste solution. Processing and disposing of e-waste incorrectly by the informal sector can be a human health and environmental hazard. The most effective way to protect the informal sector is for recyclers to incentivize the informal sector in a collection program that encourages the return to the recycler of all e-waste, whether of positive or negative value.

Stakeholder Involvement: It is important that all stakeholders are permitted to contribute towards the development of e-waste regulations. Only through multi-stakeholder participation (Producers, Collectors, Recyclers, Academia, International Organizations, Civil Society and Government) can a truly sustainable solution to the problem be found - one which creates jobs, retains material resources within a country and builds national capacity for the proper treatment of e-waste.

Regional Solutions

While recognizing the important role of the provisions of the Basel Convention and the Bamako Convention in addressing transboundary shipments of hazardous materials - and e-waste in particular - it is important to realize that efficient e-waste recycling solutions may require a regional approach instead of national approaches. The E-waste Solutions Alliance for Africa believes that, on regional level, it is possible to generate sufficient volumes of e-waste to run state of the art treatment facilities while this may not be economically feasible on national level. Such a regional approach requires harmonized e-waste legislation, and transboundary shipments of e-waste between countries in the region.

While these principles enable a fair and functioning operational framework for e-waste management in Africa, we also see recyclers setting up facilities for the appropriate treatment of the collected e-waste. The E-waste Solutions Alliance for Africa supports the growth of e-waste recycling solutions in Kenya and specifically welcomes the work being done by the East African Compliant Recycling Ltd.

Case Study: East African Compliant Recycling Ltd. (EACR), Kenya

In 2010, HP in partnership with Camara Education, an „Education through ICT“ NGO, established Kenya’s first e-waste recycling facility accepting end of life IT from business and public sector customers, consumers and the informal sector and operating to international health, safety and environmental standards.

“IT recycling is an important part of ICRC’s environmental commitments. We have been working for months to identify existing recycling centres where the procedures used are appropriate. We are now pleased to use the new EACR recycling facility, which provides a concrete solution and gives a formal, accessible channel for the safe, environmentally responsible dismantling and recycling of e-waste, allowing us to meet our environmental commitments in the region.” Alain Oppliger, Environment Adviser for International Committee of the Red Cross

Professional recycler Reclaimed Appliances (UK) Ltd, took over EACR in 2012 and expanded the scope to „everything with a plug or battery“ and to all types of plastics. In 2013, HP formed a Public Private Partnership with German Development Bank DEG and Reclaimed Appliances (UK) Ltd. to secure funding for relocation of the EACR to a larger facility in Nairobi. The EACR will source its e-waste from collection centers working with the informal sector and located all over the Kenyan territory.

We look forward to discussing the work of the E-waste Solutions Alliance for Africa at COP. If you have any questions please contact Herve Guilcher, herve.guilcher@hp.com or Jean Cox Kearns: Jean_Coxkearns@Dell.com