

UN, WEF and partners to tackle e-waste

Supported by the World Economic Forum and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), seven UN entities have come together to call for an overhaul of the current electronics system, with the aim of supporting international efforts to address e-waste challenges.



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The report calls for a systematic collaboration with major brands, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), academia, trade unions, civil society and associations in a deliberative process to reorient the system and reduce the waste of resources each year with a value greater than the GDP of most countries.

Each year, approximately 50 million tonnes of electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) are discarded - the weight of more than all commercial airliners ever made. In terms of material value, this is worth \$62.5bn - more than the GDP of most countries.

Less than 20% of this is recycled formally. Informally, millions of people worldwide (over 600,000 in China alone) work to dispose of e-waste, much of it done in working conditions harmful to both health and the environment.

The report, [*A New Circular Vision for Electronics - Time for a Global Reboot*](#), launched in Davos on 24 January, says technologies such as cloud computing and the internet of things (IoT), support gradual "dematerialisation" of the electronics industry.

Global circular value chains

Meanwhile, to capture the global value of materials in e-waste and create global circular value chains, the report also points to the use of new technology to create service business models, better product tracking and manufacturer or retailer take-back programmes.

The report notes that material efficiency, recycling infrastructure and scaling up the volume and quality of recycled materials to meet the needs of electronics supply chains will all be essential for future production.

And if the electronics sector is supported with the right policy mix and managed in the right way, it could lead to the creation of millions of decent jobs worldwide.

The joint report calls for collaboration with multinationals, SMEs, entrepreneurs, academia, trade unions, civil society and associations to create a circular economy for electronics where waste is designed out, the environmental impact is reduced and decent work is created for millions.

The new report supports the work of the E-waste Coalition, which includes:

- International Labour Organisation (ILO);
- International Telecommunication Union (ITU);
- United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment);
- United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO);
- United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR);
- United Nations University (UNU), and
- Secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm conventions.

The coalition is supported by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the World Economic Forum and coordinated by the secretariat of the Environment Management Group (EMG).

Considerable work is being done on the ground. For example, in order to grasp the opportunity of the circular economy, the Nigerian government, the Global Environment Facility and UN Environment recently announced a \$2m investment to kick off the formal e-waste recycling industry in Nigeria. The new investment will leverage over \$13m in additional financing from the private sector.

Formalising e-waste sector

According to the International Labour Organisation, in Nigeria up to 100,000 people work in the informal e-waste sector. This investment will help to create a system which formalises these workers, giving them safe and decent employment while capturing the latent value in Nigeria's 500,000 tonnes of e-waste.

UNIDO collaborates with a large number of organisations on e-waste projects, including UNU, ILO, ITU, and WHO, as well as various other partners, such as Dell and the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA). In the Latin American and Caribbean region, a UNIDO e-waste project, co-funded by GEF, seeks to support sustainable economic and social growth in 13 countries. From upgrading e-waste recycling facilities, to helping to establish national e-waste management strategies, the initiative adopts a circular economy approach, whilst enhancing regional cooperation.

Another Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy (PACE) report launched yesterday by the World Economic Forum, with support from Accenture Strategy, outlines a future in which fourth industrial revolution technologies provide a tool to achieve a circular economy efficiently and effectively, and where all physical materials are accompanied by a digital dataset (like a passport or fingerprint for materials), creating an 'internet of materials'. PACE is a collaboration mechanism and project accelerator hosted by the World Economic Forum which brings together 50 leaders from business, government

and international organisations to collaborate in moving towards the circular economy.

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