

E waste issue in South Asia



The electrical and electronic waste (e-waste) is one of the fastest growing waste streams in the world. E-waste is a term used to cover all items of electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) and its parts that have been discarded by its owner as waste without the intent of re-use.

The global quantity of e-waste generation in 2014 was estimated around 41.8 Mt. The South Asian countries are also emerging as generators of e-waste in their own right. Growth in both the sectors of ICT and mobile telephony and the rapid obsolescence of the products, the South Asian countries are confronted with the challenge of managing the generated e-waste.

The major sources of e-waste in South Asia can be divided into:

- a. Domestic (within the country): end-of-life products, post-usage, manufacturing etc.
- b. Imported (from other countries): donation, scrap for dismantling, second-hand equipments.

Strict domestic laws and higher recycling and/or disposal costs in Developed countries has resulted in transportation of the e-waste to the developing countries in Asia and Africa. As a result 80 per cent of the e-waste in these countries that is sent for recycling ends up being shipped (often illegally) to developing countries to be recycled by hundreds of thousands of informal workers. Till 1992,

Africa was the favorite dumping ground for the Western world. However with the enforcement of the Basel Convention by all the African countries, South Asia has become the favorite dumping ground, despite all South Asian countries being signatories to the Convention.

In the South Asian countries there are no standard practices for collection and recycling of e-waste at present. The e-waste finds its way to the informal sector through scrap dealers who buy the waste through auctions and from waste collectors and as a result an entire new economic sector is evolving around trading, repairing and recovering materials from redundant electronic devices. While it is a source of livelihood for the urban and rural poor, it often causes severe risks to humans and the local environment. Most of the participants in this sector are not aware of the risks, do not know of better practices, or have no access to investment capital to finance profitable improvements.

At present there is a range of legislation tries to control the transboundary movements of hazardous substances. And there are international conventions seeking to control the shipping of waste such as Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989), Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (1998) and Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001). Subsequent to these, various regional conventions have been signed to regulate hazardous waste movements. Complementing international and regional conventions, international organizations also have an important role to play,

However as E waste is a significant cross-cutting issue with global significance it requires cross-sectoral implementation and the future of e-waste management will depends not only on the effectiveness of local government and the operators of recycling services but also on community participation, together with national, regional and global initiatives.