

## REPORT ON ICT4D SERIES

### E-Waste situation in Ghana: Public Health Implications



“The fight against the digital divide has resulted in massive imports of used and new computers and other electrical and electronic equipment into developing countries, especially in Africa. E-waste has hence become one of the major challenges in the field of waste management in developing countries”

These were the opening remarks of Mr. Abu Iddrisu, Regional Director of the Environmental Protection Agency of the Northern Region. He said this when he took his turn at the Northern ICT4D Series held at the Institute for Local Government Studies in Tamale on Thursday the 26th of November 2009.

Explaining what constitutes E-waste, Mr. Iddrisu said E-waste included computers, scanners, fax machines, processors, monitors, mobile phones, cables, old fridges etc.

He indicated that 20-50 million tons of E-waste is generated per year and these constitute a huge garbage problem that find their way into most developing countries including Ghana and hence presents a unique challenge for end of useful life disposal.

On the E-waste situation in Ghana, he said end-of-life electric and electronic gadgets (mobile phones, TVs, computers, refrigerators, etc.) are generated locally by various institutions, repair shops, industries and households. He said the collection of E-waste materials is being done predominantly by the informal sector without regard to health and safety. He added that recovery of materials is also predominantly done by the informal sector using crude methods and without regard to health and safety and the environment.

Mr. Iddrisu further said that there are indications that the reliance on Electrical and Electronic Equipment (EEE) is on the rise. Some of these indicators he said includes the less restrictions on imports of used EEE, some of which arrive as end-of-life (imported e-waste). He added that there is also a general growing demand for new and used EEE by households, institutions, industry, etc. Unfortunately, he said, the standards of new EEE imported into Ghana may be low compared to those used in developed countries - hence high rate of obsolescence.

On what E-waste contains, he stated that E-waste contains valuable metals including; mercury, Barium, lead, arsenic, beryllium and cadmium and related plastic casing. He added that it also contains heavy metals that are not easily decomposed in the soil.

On how E-waste is currently disposed in Ghana he said they are simply disposed into water or on the naked ground, burnt, and or parts extracted out of them and hence generating more waste.

Speaking on the effects of E-waste, Mr. Iddrisu mentioned that they create ecological disasters, create environmental disasters, and create health problems.

On the health implications of e-waste, the Northern Regional Director of EPA mentioned that while LEAD damages the nervous systems, CADMIUM affects the proper functioning of the kidneys. He added that while MERCURY damages kidney and the brain, barium in plastics produces dioxins which can trigger swelling of brains, muscle weakness and cause damage to liver spleen and heart. He added that TONER triggers irritation of the respiratory tract.

To manage e-waste, Mr. Iddrisu called for a map out of current electronic acquisition and disposal, identification of appropriate partners for e-waste disposal, politicization of E-waste by lobbying politicians to see e-waste as a key and emerging environmental problem in Ghana. He further added that the determination of optimum solutions for e - waste in Ghana and the development of an E-waste legislation in Ghana are key factors to consider if we want to manage E-waste in Ghana

He concluded by saying that E-waste is a serious problem that is gradually catching up with us and that there is a need for all stakeholders and government to act swiftly to prevent future catastrophes. He added that the responsibility is on all of us to act swiftly and be informed about the dangers of e-waste to our health and the environment.

He called on GINKS and its partners to take the discussion of E-waste to a higher level than the ICT4D series. He urged GINKS to organize Regional workshops and seminars on the dangers of E-waste. This, he believes, will make a bigger impact in reducing the rise in E-waste in the country.

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**Source:** GINKS

**Website:** [www.ginks.org](http://www.ginks.org)    **Email:** [secretary@ginks.org](mailto:secretary@ginks.org)