

Environment and health at increasing risk from growing weight of 'e-waste'

To highlight the rising challenge posed by mountains of discarded electronics worldwide, seven UN entities came together to launch the report at the [World Economic Forum](#) in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday, in a bid to offer some solutions to a behemoth-sized problem that is making the world sicker and adding to environmental degradation.

The joint report, entitled, “A New Circular Vision for Electronics – Time for a Global Reboot”, calls for a new vision for e-waste based on the “circular economy” concept, whereby a regenerative system can minimize waste and energy leakage.

“E-waste is a growing [global challenge](#) that poses a serious threat to the environment and human health worldwide”, said Stephan Sicars, Director of the Department of Environment at the UN Industrial Development Organization. “To minimize this threat, UNIDO works with various UN agencies and other partners on a range of e-waste projects, all of which are underpinned by a circular economy approach”.

According to the report, a deliberative process must be instilled to change the system – one that collaborates with major brands, small and medium-sized enterprises, academia, trade unions and civil society.

Walking the talk

Considerable work is already under way to harness a circular economy. For example, the Nigerian Government, the Global Environment Facility and UN Environment announced a \$2 million investment to formalize an e-waste recycling industry in Nigeria. The new investment will leverage over \$13 million in additional financing from the private sector.

“Thousands of tonnes of e-waste is disposed of by the world’s poorest workers in the worst of conditions, putting their health and lives at risk”, maintained Guy Ryder, Director-General, [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO). “We need better e-waste strategies and green standards as well as closer collaboration between governments, employers and unions to make the circular economy work for both people and planet.”

Despite growing e-waste, “A New Circular Vision” points to the importance of technologies from the so-called Internet of Things – a network of devices that contain electronics and the connectivity that allows them to exchange data – through to cloud computing advances, which can all result in smarter recycling and tracking of e-waste.

“A circular economy brings with it tremendous environmental and economic

benefits for us all” said Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UN Environment). “Our planet’s survival will depend on how well we retain the value of products within the system by extending their life.”

The report supports the work of the E-waste Coalition, which includes International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)); International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)); United Nations Environment Programme ([UN Environment](#)); United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)); United Nations Institute for Training and Research ([UNITAR](#)); United Nations University ([UNU](#)) and Secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions.