

UGANDA IS STILL AT THE LEVEL OF HAVING A DRAFT POLICY ON E-WASTE MANAGEMENT RWANDA STARTS RECYCLING E-WASTE

BY HOPE MAFARANGA
AND GERALD TENYWA

As many countries in Africa embrace the latest technology that includes the use of mobile phones, computers and other electronic gadgets, a number of them have not thought about a disposal system once the gadgets have become obsolete.

According to the Rwandan minister of environment, Dr Vincent Biruta, the rapid growth of economies has contributed to massive generation of electrical and electronic waste, commonly known as e-waste. An estimated global quantity of e-waste generation in 2014 was around 41.8 million tonnes and this is expected to grow to 49.8 million tonnes in 2018, with an annual growth rate of four to five percent. And most of this is heading to developing countries for reuse and disposal.

"Rwanda, being no exception on the use of modern technologies in all sectors of her economy, which has led to an increase in the amount of discarded electrical and electronic equipment," Biruta said.

He said the discarded electrical and electronic equipments, such as lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium, and selenium, among others, pose peculiar threats and risks to human health and to the environment, if not properly handled and disposed.

"Adequate e-waste management allows the recovery of precious metals, such as gold, silver, platinum, palladium, copper and tin from disposed components. It also creates new business and job creation opportunities in the e-waste collection and management value chain, while reducing environmental burden to landfills," Biruta explained.

He added that e-waste with such risks and potentials should be separated from other types of waste and either recycled or properly disposed.

"There is an urgent need for a clear framework for handling and disposal of the e-waste," Biruta said.

The e-waste programme manager at the trade and industry ministry, Olivier Mbera, said one of the measures Rwanda has taken was to carry out a detailed inventory exercise to establish the current e-waste situation, develop a strategy, policy and legal framework in order to have environmental friendly e-waste collection centres and dismantling facility.

Mbera said the ministry



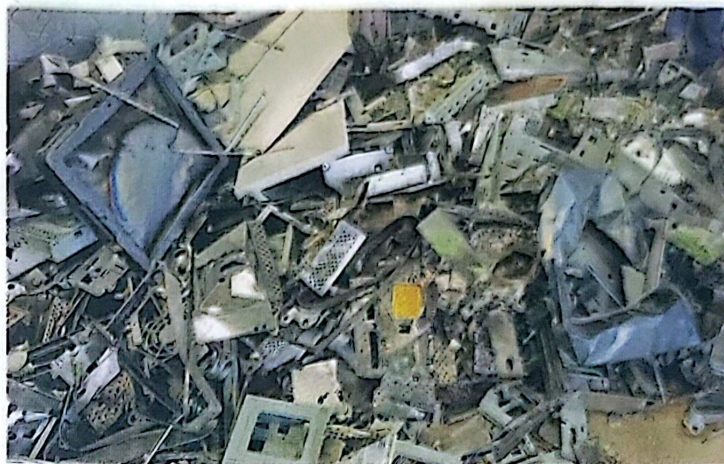
The e-waste plant in Bugesera district

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Old electronic equipment contain toxic materials and some of organic persistent pollutants

is also creating awareness in the private sector, public institutions and the communities, adding that the facility will benefit the conservation of natural resources, creation of green jobs, and reduction of risks from hazardous materials affecting human health and environment.

"The national framework for e-waste recycling and a countrywide collection scheme with incentives and the establishment of a dismantling facility will be connected to sustainable recycling industries on a national, regional and international level," Mbera said.

David Toovey, the communications advisor for Rwanda's Green Fund, said the country has invested close



Old computer parts ready to be recycled



Mbera (left) takes environment minister Dr Biruta around the plant

to \$1.5m in an e-waste facility.

Located in Bugesera in eastern Rwanda, the second plant in Africa after the one in South Africa, the facility is designed to collect and treat e-waste according to the required standards.

"The recycling facility is now operational and yielding

positive socio-economic impacts for the country. So far 300 people are already employed in green jobs and students have been given internships at the facility," he said.

Toovey also said collection centres have been established in each district across the

country, which has created more than 1,000 employment opportunities.

"The e-waste facility is so advanced that it can recycle 15,000 tonnes per year. Sustainable e-waste management is a robust engine of green growth as both consumers and recyclers play their part. We are proud of what we have achieved with support from the Rwanda Green Fund," he said.

Precious metals such as gold, copper and silver, along with other electronic components, are being extracted, recycled and sold to be made into other valuable items.

Jean de Dieu Rurangirwa, the Rwanda minister of Information Communication and Technology (ICT), said the demand for electrical and electronic equipment has significantly increased in Rwanda due to the country's

rapid economic development. He said the demand is enhanced by the national initiative to enhance ICT that require various ICT tools such as computers and mobile phones.

"As such, there has been an enormous increase in ICT usage that led to high demand for these newer products. Additionally, as people are eager for newer technologies, the period for use of these products is progressively decreasing. Consequently, older and outdated products are becoming obsolete and are being discarded as e-waste in large quantities and at increasing rates worldwide," he said.

"In most cases, e-waste is mixed with ordinary waste at homes and disposed of at regular dump sites. The facility will, therefore control and of life electronics and electrical equipment resulting industry development, including ICT, thus enhancing green and healthy environment," he said.

UGANDA'S POLICY IN DRAFT
According to Bob Nuwagira, the information officer at the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Uganda has formulated a draft policy on e-waste.

"We have a problem with e-waste," said Nuwagira, adding that e-waste is currently considered as waste and ends up at the landfill, which is supposed to receive only solid waste.

"We do not have a landfill for e-waste and do not know how to manage it," he said.

"Old electronic equipment contain toxic materials and some of them are persistent organic pollutants."

The quantities of e-waste remain unknown, but it is thought to be large.

"Many people use mobile phones and computers," he said, adding that such gadgets are being changed without proper disposal of the old ones.

"Most people are still keeping electronic waste in their houses because of low levels of awareness."

In addition, the e-waste sometimes is worked by artisanal workers, which Nuwagira, believes exposes them to toxic materials and endangers their health.

Such concerns, according to Nuwagira are behind the policy on e-waste, which is currently in draft form.

"The National Environment Management Authority, together with the ICT Ministry, have been developing a policy on e-waste," said Nuwagira.

As Uganda grapples with e-waste, neighbouring Rwanda is leading the way in solving e-waste problem.