e-WASTE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

- *Scoping Exercise*

PROCEEDINGS

New Delhi, India
21st September, 2007

Organised by

Development Alternatives

SACEP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Development Alternatives and South Asia Cooperative environment Program on 22 September 2007 jointly organised the ***Scoping Exercise on e-Waste Management in South Asia*** in New Delhi, India. The workshop was attended by representatives from all sectors, government, industry, non-governmental organisations and reach institutions, from across South Asia.

The scoping exercise was conducted to review the situation, as it existed in all the countries of the region, identify priority concerns and agree on suitable action points. The workshop not only enabled sharing of experiences and country information, but also pondered on some specific action points at the country and regional levels.

As part of the scoping exercise the following themes were discussed in details:

Based on the country presentations and panel discussion, the following themes were identified for further discussions:

- Inventorisation
- Industry practices - cleaner design, better products
- Policy and regulatory framework
- Collection systems and recycling
- Imports and transboundary movement
- Awareness creation

Constitution of a Regional Task Force on e-waste management in South Asia was discussed as part of the scoping exercise. The main objective of the Task Force would be to look at various recommendations, made in this workshop and later, assess how these could be brought into action in different countries as well as at the regional level, and coordinate action at the regional level.

It was agreed that a coherent approach for e-waste management need to be adopted, taking the South Asian perspectives as a whole.

1.0 Background

Development Alternatives (DA), India, is a non-profit research, development and consultancy organisation that fosters the new relationship in the people, technology and environment interactions needed to attain the goal of sustainable development.

South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) is the intergovernmental environmental organization for the South Asia region. SACEP, as in the programme objectives, focuses to achieve a regional strategy to assist, enable and facilitate the South Asian countries to address the waste management related issues.

DA recognizes the need for regional cooperation and multi-stakeholder participation in South Asia and is hence facilitating adoption of environmentally sound management for e-waste. SACEP seeks to work in areas where regional cooperation and collective action can add value to member countries and produce better outcomes. With its objective to establish a network of institutes, stakeholders and identify centres of excellence in the region for waste management, SACEP lays high priority to e-Waste management.

DA and SACEP propose working together to reduce environmental and health impacts through scientific e-waste management while demonstrating benefits and ensuring multistakeholder participation in the South Asia region by focusing on the following:

- Document current status of e-waste management in the computer and mobile phone industry, concentrating on countries in South Asia.
- Help understand issues, articulate concerns and develop a plan of action including some proposals for seeking funding to engage in demonstration of feasibility of management options, identified above.

Some of the activities identified in this context include

- establishment of contacts with stakeholders, including governments and private sector
- one workshop for stakeholder consultations
- development of one background paper with references to on-going practices and status on the initiatives at various levels (regional / national / local) undertaken by different agencies.

2.0 Inaugural Session

3.1 Opening Remarks

Dr. Ashok Khosla, Chairman, Development Alternatives

Dr. Ashok Khosla, Chairman, Development Alternatives welcomed the participants. Dr Khosla highlighted the importance of the workshop as it focussed on critical issues in the present pattern of consumption in the world, which would not only lead to depletion of resources, but would fundamentally affect the process of development itself. In the past thirty years the world has seen a remarkable growth in the

Information Technology (IT) and the mobile phone sectors, and there has been a consequent growth in all forms of electrical and electronic components and products. While both these technologies could liberate people, create jobs and help promote business, they use materials that are scarce and often toxic. This has created a challenge in disposal of the products at the end of their life cycle, especially in South Asia. Though some efforts are being made at the manufacturing level to reduce pollution, the whole life cycle cost, along with costs of offsetting environmental change, had not been taken into account fully. At the same time, it was also important to see if the disposal process could generate economic value as well, in terms of better recovery, thus reducing wastage of scarce materials, instead of looking at a blanket ban on usage of such scarce materials as a knee jerk reaction to the question of environmental damage. Dr. Khosla concluded by stating that, in order to manage the process of safe disposal as well as recovery, it was important to develop good policies as well as constant involvement of civil society, to provide deeper and wider insights, keeping a watch on the actual process of disposal/ recovery.

Dr. Arvind Boaz, Director General, South Asian Co-operative Environment Programme

Dr. Arvind Boaz stressed on the fact that e-waste was one of the biggest concerns of the countries in the South Asian region. The rapidly growing economies of the region, coupled with the large population, meant that electronic goods manufacturers all over the world saw this region as their prime target, in turn leading to high sales (both new and replacement) of various electronic goods, especially computers and mobile phones. This had led to generation of large quantities of e-waste, with new models replacing old ones. In addition, because of increasing restrictions elsewhere, South Asia had witnessed the phenomenon of dumping of e-waste into the region, with e-waste exported to South Asia rapidly increasing in the last few years.

Dr. Boaz pointed out that market forces, if left unregulated, dictated that toxic waste would always run "downhill" on an economic path of least resistance, flooding towards the poorest countries, where labour was cheap and occupational and environment protections inadequate. However, he said, that though free trade in hazardous substances was not desirable, there was still an opportunity in proper handling, recovery and disposal of e-waste. The Industry had a major role to play in this issue, requiring greater interaction between industries and the other stakeholders. As countries in the region had similar problems, the aim of this workshop was to discover the extent of the problem in all the countries and develop a

common action agenda. This meeting provided an opportunity to share the different approaches and findings on better e-waste management, for the South Asian region. Such information sharing was vital to accelerate policy, technology and investment progress in the region.

Dr. Boaz added that while some good practices were developed throughout Asia, most decision makers did not have access to such information, and that this was a key reason for stronger regional cooperation in this area. The South Asia Co-operative Environment Program, being an inter-government body established in 1982 by the Governments of South Asia, to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the region, had identified waste management as one of the top priority thematic areas. As such, SACEP was very pleased to facilitate this valuable event. It was hoped that the dialogue would help gain insights on a range of issues related to e-waste management. SACEP had also initiated action to set up the regional centre for the Basel Convention at SACEP.

Dr. Lakshmi Raghupati, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India

Dr. Lakshmi Raghupati, explained the action proposed by MoEF with regard to e-waste. Though globally no definition as such existed for e-waste, even in the Basel Convention, the MoEF tried to put together a suitable definition for environmental purposes, and India was among the first to include such a definition as a part of Hazardous Waste Rules. It was said that the danger of becoming a dumping ground existed for all the countries in the South Asian region, it was also a fact that the usage of electronic gadgets was growing in a very fast manner compared to the western countries. As these products have a high rate of obsolescence, considerable production of waste would be from inside the country as well. Though imports of e-waste were not allowed, it did enter in the region as second hand goods through charity, and that these could soon be dumped.

The production of e-goods is mostly in the form of assembly rather than manufacturing in India, legally these also were deemed as processes where hazardous constituents were present. Import and export of such goods was also regulated by law, ensuring that environmental concerns were considered and appropriate responsibility taken by the importers. To help implement the law, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India had recently prepared a set of guidelines for recycling of e-waste. The MoEF had also set up a Task Force under its Additional Secretary, in which representatives from various ministries were represented, along with research organisations. This Task Force was entrusted with the responsibility of reshaping the guidelines developed by CPCB, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Hazardous Waste Rules had been recently amended, encouraging recycling, in order to reduce the toxic material going into the environment.

Dr. Raghupati said the major thing lacking in e-waste management was having a proper inventory, and that this was India's weakest point. An exercise on

inventorising was taken up for Delhi and a few metros, but this was limited and there is a need for a national inventory, which would help in better decision-making on the disposal processes. It was hoped that this workshop would provide suitable inputs and recommendations, which could be taken up for further action.

Dr. U. P. Phadke, Ministry of Information and Technology, Government of India.

Dr. U.P. Phadke, Scientist, R&D, Electronics wing of IT, GoI, explained that from the IT Ministry viewpoint, while the software sector was growing rapidly, the hardware (manufacturing) had not grown as fast, and to this, the Ministry was developing a Hardware Policy. He emphasized the fact that as a part of this policy, environmental issues were also considered, and one of the concerns was e-waste. He pointed out that it is also important to look at designing the products to get cleaner products in the first place, i.e. have less polluting index. The Department of IT had take some initiatives in this regard, starting a pilot project with UNDP assistance, in modifying not just product design but also the process design, so that other chemicals used in production would also be less polluting. The Department had also very recently initiated a project at the National Metallurgical Laboratory (NML), to look at a similar effort in the recycling process as well.

One difficulty faced by such authorised recyclers was the lack of sufficient raw material, and lack of material reaching these recyclers, though according to the IT industry there is sufficient e-waste in the country. Hence a system for satisfactory collection was required, and if costs for such collection and transport were high, the Ministry was also looking at whether these industries deserved a kind of incentive, in the form of subsidy for effective management of waste.

He concluded by pointing out that producer responsibility, in not only making the product cleaner, but also in managing safe disposal / recovery, in terms of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is the key concern. He wished the workshop all success and hoped that the workshop would look into EPR issues as well, keeping in mind the point that the manufacturing industries in the developed world was on a different footing as compared to India, and looked forward to suggestions and inputs from the workshop.

Dr. K Vijaya Lakshmi, Assistant Vice President (Environment), Development Alternatives

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