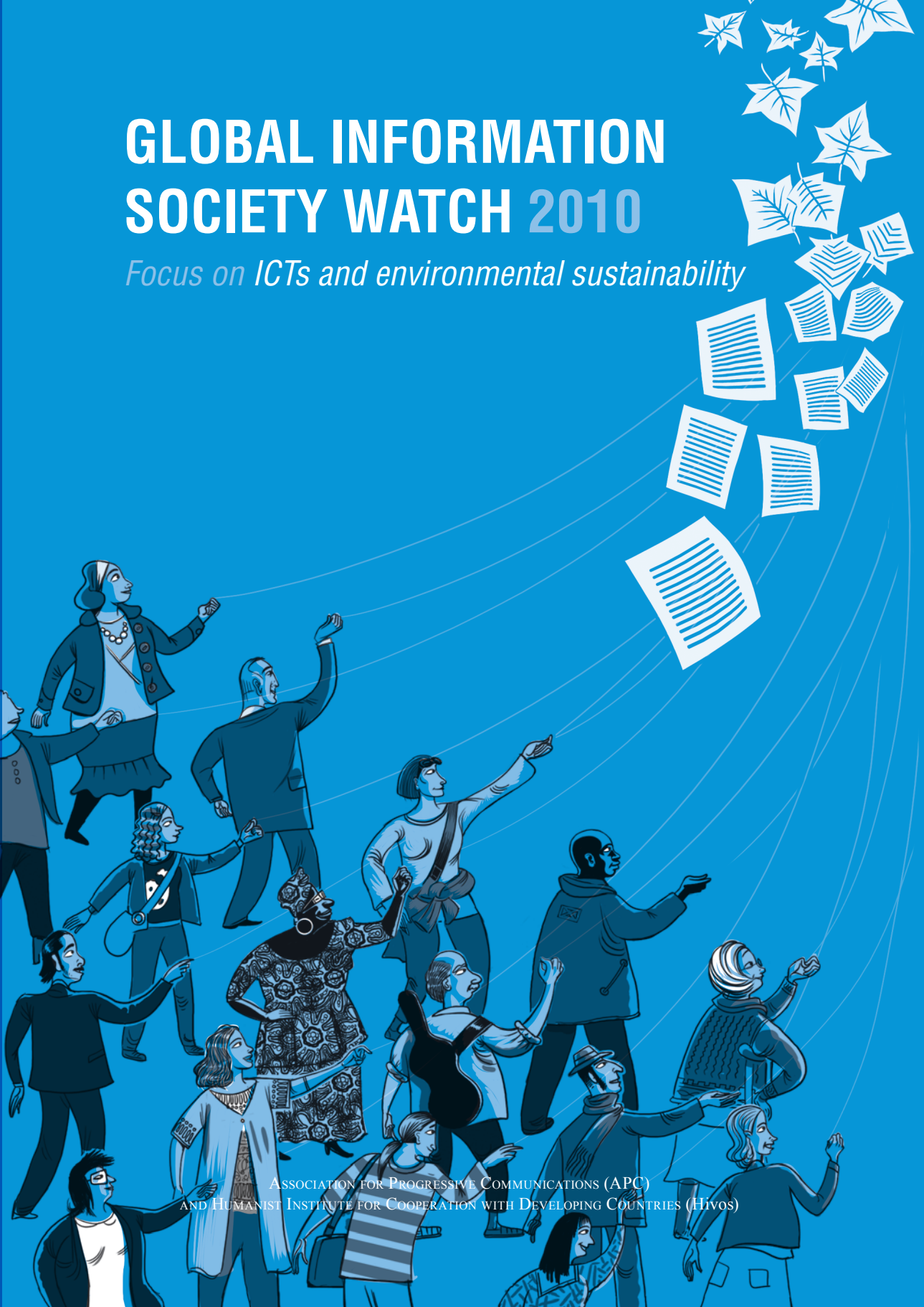
GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2010

Focus on ICTs and environmental sustainability



Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
and Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch

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Introduction

Nigeria's land mass and population make it a major stakeholder in the region when it comes to electronic waste (e-waste). It has been suggested that the country is emerging as one of the top dumping grounds for toxic, chemical and e-waste from the developed world.[1] An examination of the e-waste situation in Nigeria has a good chance of identifying critical policy gaps that can be addressed and/or promoted. Such a study of Nigeria's e-waste landscape must necessarily take into account its social, economic, political and demographic realities. This report takes the first steps in that direction.

It is a good omen that Nigeria was among the Africa representatives who were invited to the WasteCon 2008 conference in Durban, South Africa.[2] It was at that conference that a framework document was fashioned which encouraged every country to develop its own roadmap on how to handle the growing e-waste problem.

For the purposes of this report, e-waste is defined as obsolete electrical and electronic devices[3] – unserviceable products such as televisions, computers, computer monitors, keyboards, mobile phones and radios.

Policy and legislative context

The Nigerian National Policy on the Environment (1998) does not make any explicit mention of e-waste. However, the federal government recognises the need for an integrated national waste management strategy, and the Federal Ministry of Environment has proposed a bill that will be known as the National Environmental Management Act. It deals with air quality; atmospheric protection; protection and management of sensitive ecosystems; conservation of biological diversity; protection of hilly and mountainous areas; erosion and coastal management; and forest management. Sections 4(L) Part II and 16(1)(j) Part III deal with waste management. Additional national initiatives include the development of a draft National Healthcare Waste Management Plan in March 2007.

However, apart from a few isolated efforts, there is a paucity of nationwide measures aimed at e-waste management, and Nigeria still lacks the legislation and enforcement capacity as well as the infrastructure to handle e-waste in an environmentally sound manner. The Basel Action Network (BAN) estimated that about 400,000 used computers were being imported into Nigeria every month, out of which 25% to 75% were junk. It is estimated that the poor management of Nigeria's environment is costing the nation roughly USD 5 billion annually.[4] In 2008 the European Union (EU) selected Nigeria as one of fourteen African countries that can develop the capacity to manage e-waste.

E-waste status

In developed economies, garbage collection is often the responsibility of the local municipalities and townships. This has not been the case in Nigeria. It is in recognition of these needs that the Federal Ministry of Environment commissioned feasibility studies in fifteen cities for the construction of integrated waste management facilities. The cities selected were Aba, Abeokuta, Abuja, Benin, Ibadan, Ilorin, Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, Maiduguri, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Uyo and Yola.

The studies recommended an integrated waste management facility approach with the following components:

- Material recovery facility
- Composting plant
- Incinerator
- Landfill cells, methane recovery system and leachate treatment facility
- Plastic recycling plant.

The designated national authority to coordinate Nigeria's carbon market is the Special Climate Change Unit. At the same time, the government's Integrated Waste Management Programme under the Clean Development Mechanism has earmarked NGN 250 million (about USD 1.6 million) in seed funding per facility. Several of these facilities have been or are in the process of being set up. Delta Environmental Logistics (DEL) in Rivers State has already established the first of these one-stop waste management facilities. Kano State has reached an advanced stage in developing a facility and has the approval to access the funds. Although these facilities do not deal explicitly with e-waste, they still remain the most visible evidence that the Nigerian government will fulfil its pledge of getting control of the escalating e-waste problem.

1 www.greendiary.com/entry/e-waste-poisoning-in-nigeria

2 ewasteguide.info/durban_declaration

3 Nnorom, I. C. and Osibanjo, O. (2008) Electronic waste (e-waste): Material flows and management practices in Nigeria, *Waste Management*, 28. www.ewaste.ch/biblio/electronic-w-1

4 www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2003/july/waste.htm

The specific challenges regarding e-waste in all states of Nigeria concern its collection and disposal. The regulatory environment for these activities is either non-existent or poorly implemented. The few civil society organisations that have some interest in waste management tend to be more focused on the massive and enduring environmental degradation caused by oil drilling and export in the Delta region of Nigeria.

Mobile telephony infrastructure has been the predominant information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure on the Nigerian landscape. By December 2009, Nigeria had about 73 million active mobile subscribers,[5] in a country with a total population of 155 million,[6] making it the fastest growing mobile market in Africa. This in effect also means that Nigeria has the fastest growing e-waste volumes when it comes to mobile phones.

Civil society engagement in the e-waste policy, advocacy and implementation process is still sketchy and uncoordinated, especially because of the size and diversity of the Nigerian socioeconomic landscape. While organisations in sectors like health and agriculture have recognised the value of mobile phones as a cheap and effective tool for information dissemination, few have given thought to the disposal of the phones once they are old.

The most comprehensive civil society action in this regard so far is the e-waste assessment studies launched in Nigeria, Benin and Ghana by the Secretariat of the Basel Convention Regional Centre (BCRC).[7] Getting local communities and relevant civil society groups involved in the monitoring, collection and disposal of these devices can be a long-term sustainability strategy. If they are incorporated into the BCRC study, they can provide local-level focus and a reality check to complement the initiative.

The activities of the Federal Ministry of Environment are supposed to trickle down to the population through the state-based offices of the Environmental Protection Agencies. These are much smaller, poorly equipped and poorly staffed civil service units, whose grasp of the gravity of the issues they are required to supervise is rather poor. There are very few state governments, with the exception of Lagos State, that have a proactive waste management policy, good infrastructure and some form of reliable implementation. Lagos, as Nigeria's busiest sea port, is the main gateway for most of the technology that becomes e-waste in Nigeria; but the markets for these devices are in the hinterland and virtually every state in Nigeria has a growing pile of unprocessed e-waste.

New trends

There is a growing pace in the collaboration between international e-waste regulators – such as the Dutch Agency VROM-Inspectorate and the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (INECE) – and the Nigerian National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA). It was these collaborations that made it possible to intercept yet another e-waste shipment from Europe.[8]

The increasingly tough stance of the Nigerian government, and the pronouncements of its key policy agencies – the Federal Ministry of Environment, Housing and Urban Development, the NESREA, the Standards Organisation of Nigeria, the Computer Professionals Registration Council of Nigeria and the Nigeria Customs Service – indicate a proactive attitude, especially a desire to engage with civil society.[9]

There are also an increasing number of institutions and individuals who can be regarded as key players in the Nigerian e-waste policy landscape. They include:

- The minister of Environment, Housing and Urban Development
- The director of the Pollution Control Department, and the desk officer for e-waste
- The director of the Basel Convention Regional Coordinating Centre for Africa (BCRCC), Ibadan
- The Federal Ministry of Science and Technology
- The Standards Organisation of Nigeria
- The NESREA
- The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)
- The Comptroller General of Customs
- NGOs
- The private sector
- Dealers in electronic materials
- The media.

Action steps

In plotting the way forward for advocacy, the following steps are needed:

- An audit of key stakeholder groups with an interest in environmental policy. They will include institutional and individual consumers, equipment manufacturers and retailers, recyclers, refurbishers, trade associations, labour unions, media, environmental and health

5 Nigeria Communications Commission (2010) *Subscriber Data at a Glance (Year 2008-January 2010).* www.ncc.gov.ng

6 United Nations (2009) *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision – Highlights*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York. www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2008/wpp2008_highlights.pdf

7 www.basel.int/centers/description/BCRCataGlance.pdf

8 Bivbere, G., Oritse, G. and Obi, I. (2010) Another Toxic Waste Vessel Arrested in Lagos, *Vanguard*, 4 June. allafrica.com/stories/201006040305.html

9 www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=158781

advocacy groups, state and local governments, and federal agencies and regulators, as well as European Union, United Nations and G-8 nations representatives. The Computer and Allied Products Association of Nigeria (CAPDAN)[10] have indicated their readiness to collaborate with other stakeholders to stem the tide of e-waste.

- It is necessary to establish an online repository for monitoring, giving visibility to, and tracking the activities and achievements of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Housing and Urban Development, NESREA, and the BCRCC. These agencies have indicated a willingness to engage with civil society on e-waste matters.[11]
- It is important to ensure ready access, in local languages and in local media, to research results and core documents from e-waste-related agencies.
- It is necessary for civil society to engage in advocacy efforts on e-waste, including meetings with media houses, facilitating radio and TV discussions, developing awareness-raising material, and the translation of information into local languages. ■

10 The Sun Publishing (2010) E-waste: Nigeria now a dumping site?, *The Daily Sun*, 23 March. www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/suntech/2010/mar/23/suntech-23-03-2010-001.htm

11 www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=158781

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2010

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2010 investigates the impact that information and communications technologies (ICTs) have on the environment – both good and bad.

Written from a civil society perspective, **GISWatch 2010** covers some 50 countries and six regions, with the key issues of ICTs and environmental sustainability, including climate change response and electronic waste (e-waste), explored in seven expert thematic reports. It also contains an institutional overview and a consideration of green indicators, as well as a mapping section offering a comparative analysis of "green" media spheres on the web.

While supporting the positive role that technology can play in sustaining the environment, many of these reports challenge the perception that ICTs will automatically be a panacea for critical issues such as climate change – and argue that for technology to really benefit everyone, consumption and production patterns have to change. In order to build a sustainable future, it cannot be "business as usual".

GISWatch 2010 is a rallying cry to electronics producers and consumers, policy makers and development organisations to pay urgent attention to the sustainability of the environment. It spells out the impact that the production, consumption and disposal of computers, mobile phones and other technology are having on the earth's natural resources, on political conflict and social rights, and the massive global carbon footprint produced.

GISWatch 2010 is the fourth in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.

GISWatch is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos).

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