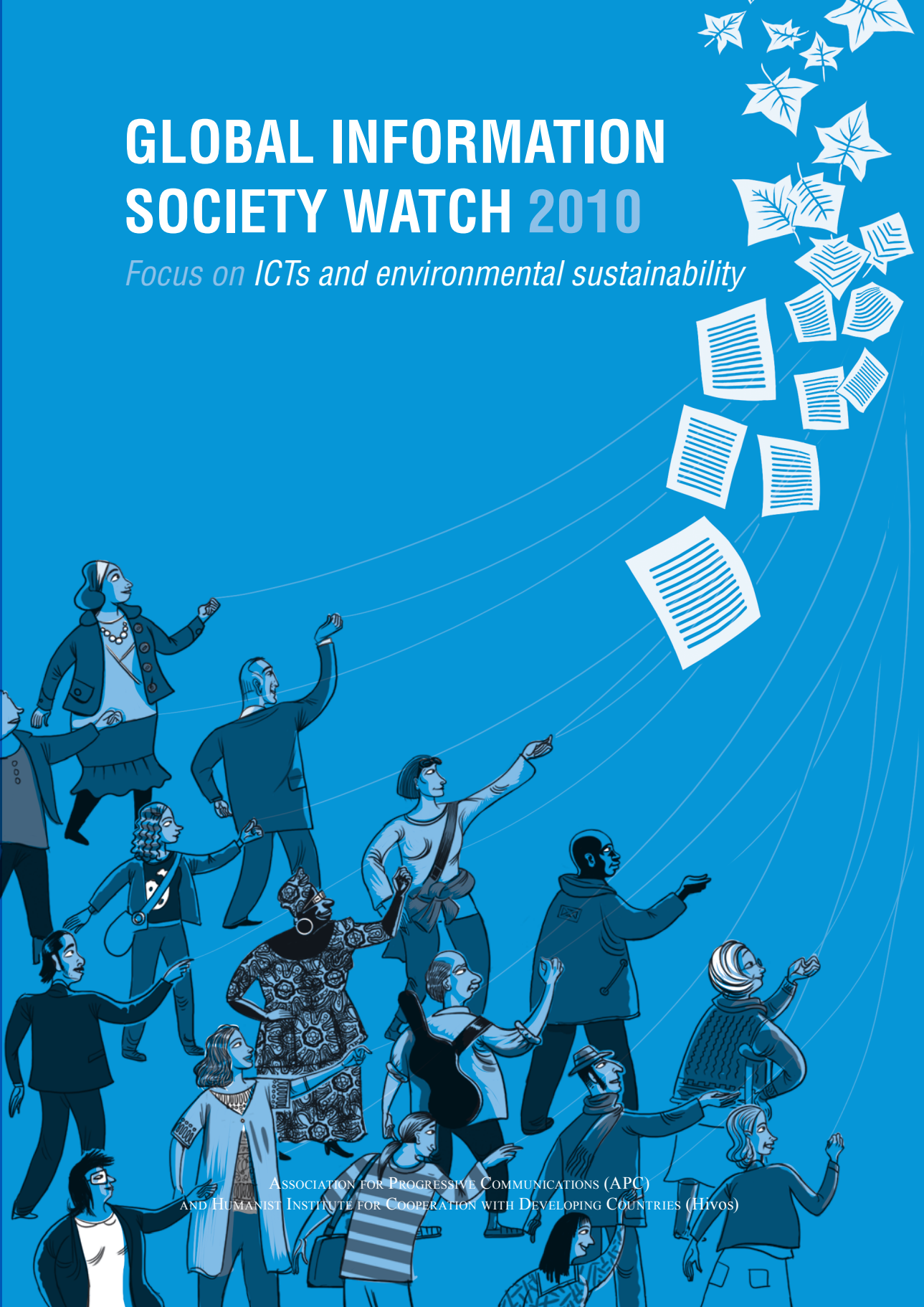
GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2010

Focus on ICTs and environmental sustainability



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

Global Information Society Watch

2010

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Project coordinator
Karen Banks

Editor
Alan Finlay

Assistant editor
Lori Nordstrom

Publication production
Karen Higgs

Graphic design
MONOCROMO
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 2 400 1685

Cover illustration
Matías Bervejillo

Proofreading
Stephanie Biscomb, Lori Nordstrom, Álvaro Queiruga

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OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Applied Information Management (AIM)
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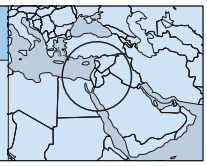

Introduction

There is a widespread lack of awareness of electronic waste (e-waste) and an absence of an e-waste policy and legislation in Palestine. Palestinian officials and relevant institutions, which are living in a territory that is plagued by a prolonged Israeli military occupation and that is struggling with deep internal governance strife, view e-waste policies and legislation as low on their list of priorities – that is, if the issue even makes it onto their radar. Our research indicates that only a few local municipalities tasked with solid waste collection are working on e-waste. It is our impression that this research effort was the first time the topic has ever been specifically addressed in Palestine. Nevertheless, throughout Palestine, dismantling computers and taking out all the good and usable parts to reuse is common, especially in the Gaza Strip, which is under siege, and legally importing parts is nearly impossible.

Policy and legislative context

Our research took us to the main cities of Palestine: Nablus, Ramallah, El-Bireh, Hebron and Gaza. We also spoke to representatives of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority. Not only are there no actual policies or legislation related to e-waste, but many we spoke to dismissed its importance given other priorities, and suspected low e-waste volumes. However, many businesses, ministries and municipalities do have in place policies or practices of donating their information and communications technology (ICT) equipment for refurbishment and reuse in academic institutions, both schools and universities. The absence of state policy and legislation related to e-waste can be directly attributed to the fact that Palestine is under military occupation, which leaves more important priorities. The fact that Palestine does not have full jurisdiction over its land, including many of its solid waste dumps, contributes to the lack of attention e-waste musters. It should be noted that East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, both also under Israeli occupation, each have their own particular political and security constraints which exasperate dealing with the e-waste issue. These areas are legally part of the occupied Palestinian territory; however, Israel retains jurisdiction either directly (via annexation of East Jerusalem) or indirectly (via blockade on the Gaza Strip).

Reuse and refurbishment, but little widespread knowledge of e-waste

There is a serious lack of knowledge on the actual topic of e-waste. The most important issue that needs to be raised in Palestine is awareness of the damage that e-waste may cause. Without such awareness, it can be expected that addressing e-waste policy, legislation and best practices will not be realised in the short and medium term.

The Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA)[1] is a group of Palestinian private sector firms that created a professional trade association to defend the interests of the ICT sector. PITA represents over 80 ICT-specific companies working in various sub-sectors. PITA operates an IT incubator called the Palestine Information and Communication Incubator (PICTI).[2] When challenged on the importance of the issue of e-waste, Hassan Omar, PICTI's incubator manager, said that "we need to benchmark what e-waste policies exist in the region, and integrate with them."

General manager of IT Supplies and Computer Technology at the West Bank-based Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT),[3] Jamil Zagharneh, said that he has never heard of e-waste and had no information about the topic. He did note some basic information about what is done with their own offices' used ICT equipment. When ICT products are no longer usable, an IT technician examines the products and writes up a report, after which they decide whether to donate them to schools or universities or, if beyond repair, discard them in the nearest public garbage dump. According to Zagharneh the ministry has no plans for introducing e-waste policy or legislation because of their other, more important priorities.

An interview was also conducted with an organisation called Joint Service Council for Solid Waste Management.[4] Reem Khalil, a member of the organisation, told us that they have never worked with any e-waste projects and was unable to direct us to any organisation that does.

Nasser al-Khateeb, director of ICT Supplies at the Supplies and Procurement Department in the Ministry of Finance,[5] advised that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) mostly repairs their ICT equipment until it can no longer be used. In some instances, when they have a surplus of used equipment they no longer need, it is sold by a public bidding process. In other cases, they donate their used computers and printers to academic institutions. If they finally reach the point of disposing of ICTs, they go through a short and basic process: first, an IT technician examines the product and writes up a report and second, there is a meeting between the head representative of the department

1 www.pita.ps

2 www.picti.ps

3 www.pmtit.ps

4 palestine.ded.de/cipp/ded/custom/pub/content,lang,2/oid,12819/ticket,g_u_e_s_t/~/Joint_Service_Council_for_Solid_Waste_Management.html

5 www.pmof.ps/en/index.php?pagess=home

and the IT technician to decide whether to keep and fix the product, to donate it, or to remove the important parts that can be reused, and dispose of the rest by breaking it with a hammer, burning, or burying.

The municipalities of Gaza, Nablus and Hebron were not able to provide any useful information, but they did say that they have no idea what e-waste is and they have no rules or procedures on disposing of ICTs. As far as we were able to discern, e-waste is usually just disposed of as if it were normal garbage.

In the Municipality of Ramallah[6] we interviewed Jad Kondah, general manager of IT. He told us that there is no policy for e-waste and that currently they are trying to work on a general recycling programme throughout the city. He did not know exactly how and where old IT equipment is disposed of.

At the Municipality of Al-Bireh[7] Dr. Eyad Daraghmeh is in charge of solid waste. Daraghmeh said that he has tried working on projects to help recycle ICTs on several occasions, but because he was a municipality staff person he needed approval from other government officials. However, he never received it. Daraghmeh preferred not to go into specifics about the recycling projects he was referring to. Our understanding is that he may be currently pursuing them through different channels. He also noted that, to date, the only ICT products that are directly disposed of by the municipality are computer monitors and obsolete printers. Other ICT equipment is either repaired or put into a storeroom. These storerooms typically contain an array of obsolete computers, printers, photocopy machines and fax machines that the municipality departments no longer want or that cannot be otherwise used.

Although a structured approach to e-waste does not exist, the awareness of recycling and donating ICT products to civil society is clearly prevalent. For example, in addition to the above-mentioned practices, there is a project at Birzeit University in Palestine called the Linux Terminal Server Project (LTSP).[8] This is part of a worldwide project that started in Canada. The project collects old computers and uses the parts to build servers and workstations. This project was successfully implemented at the Birzeit computer lab and also in one public school in the city of Birzeit.

New trends

We did find a disturbing general trend that should be addressed in the context of e-waste as well: Israeli solid waste is trucked into the occupied Palestinian territory and dumped in illegal dumping sites.[9] Given that Israel is a much more modern and developed economy, with ICT production facilities in operation, this trend poses an immediate danger, especially given the lack of awareness and regulation on the Palestinian side.

Action steps

- Immediately stop the use of illegal dumping sites.
- Educate people in Palestine about the seriousness of e-waste.
- Promote the separation of e-waste from general solid waste in Palestine.
- Promote organisational efforts to address e-waste in the various cities of Palestine.
- Develop a national policy and legislation that deals with e-waste in Palestine.
- Create public awareness about the new policy and legislation through educational institutions, governmental institutions, and the private sector.
- Build capacity at the municipality level to implement and be in compliance with the new legislation. ■

6 www.ramallah-city.org/english.aspx

7 www.al-bireh.org

8 plip.eifl.net/eifl-foss/ltsp

9 www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/green-now-1.293136

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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