

Case study - Benelux Afro Center: Innovative relay stations involving young people in the proper recycling of e-waste in the DRC

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Project / Programme	Benelux Afro Center
Region / Country	Democratic Republic of Congo
Website	http://www.bacmd.net/atelie-recyclage.html
Circularity	Proper management of the e-waste chain, youth skills development, innovation

Overview

Some studies have shown that 26,100 tonnes of electrical and electronic equipment enter the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) each year, of which **16,050 tonnes become e-waste**.^[1] Much of this is dumped, posing serious environmental and health risks. To help address this problem, the Benelux Afro Center (BAC), an NGO that has been importing crates of computers into the country for educational purposes, developed an e-waste management programme in 2016 to support its computers-for-schools project in the city of Kinshasa. The innovative programme, which emphasises the proper treatment of e-waste, has created employment for young people, and is also reported to have increased school enrolment.

About the project

Benelux Afro Center (BAC) is a [WorldLoop](#) partner working in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. For its computers-for-schools programme, it receives containers of computers from the NGO [Close the Gap](#), and redistributes these to schools in Kinshasa. A total of 10 schools were equipped with computer equipment over a three-year period, with classes receiving 10 to 15 computers. However, a challenge that BAC faced was that the end-of-life computers were stored in rooms at the schools, and not disposed of properly. In 2016, the [King Baudouin Foundation](#), in an attempt to address this problem, was interested in creating an opportunity for young people to become involved in a new sector of development, and supported BAC in setting up an e-waste programme.

The project has several core activities, including raising awareness about e-waste in communities and among businesses; e-waste collection, sorting and recycling; and exporting sorted components to Belgium for recycling.

Setting up relay stations

The project involves setting up “relay stations” for collecting e-waste, and for awareness raising about the hazards of e-waste. The stations have been set up in Kisantu, Mbanza Ngungu, Matadi, Boma and Muanda, all located in Kongo Central, and are managed by young people who have been trained in e-waste management. The city of Boma was included because of the large amounts of e-waste that collects at the port. The training was also later extended to the city of Lubumbashi.

All e-waste collected at these various relay stations is brought to a dismantling workshop in Matadi, where it is sorted and recycled properly. The project had recycled 13,500 kilograms of e-waste by 2017, and by 2021 had recycled nearly 141 tonnes of e-waste. Each relay station provides work for 10 young people, mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds, while three people are permanently employed at the Matadi workshop. They are helped by about another 10 occasional day workers.

Innovation

A key innovation of the project is that the e-waste is not simply sorted and exported for recycling. For example, metal waste is processed by the students and made into beds, chairs and benches. Waste is also transformed into gardening tools, such as rakes and spades.

Multistakeholder support

The government, through the Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism, provides administrative support to the project, and allows exemptions with regard to the export of e-waste, as well as for the import of materials necessary for the execution of the project. Other actors such as NGOs bring their expertise in the field of waste processing or the use of machines or devices used in processing.

Under the leadership of the Belgian NGO Close The Gap and WorldLoop, partners of BAC, around 20 Belgian industrialists have assisted with the financing of the project, which has supplemented the funding of the King Baudouin Foundation.

Conclusion

The programme has had many positive outcomes. It has increased the collection and recycling of e-waste from individuals, local authorities, telecommunications distributors and operators, companies and state structures. It has expanded beyond Kinshasa, and included the export of sorted e-waste to Belgium for proper treatment. It has also encouraged the innovative recycling of e-waste such as the creation of furniture and gardening implements, which has increased the visibility and continuity of the project. The acquisition of a shredder also helped reduce the volume of plastic waste and allowed for the sale of hard plastics, supporting the sustainability of the project. Lastly, the initiative has introduced a course on Sustainable Management of Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) in the school curriculum. An increase in school enrolment was also reported in 2020 at one school running the programme (ITP Nzadi in Matadi in Kongo Central province), which was attributed to the programme being offered at the school.

Further reading

For more on the geographic location of the recycling activities, see https://www.congovirtuel.com/page_province_kongo_central.php and https://www.caid.cd/graphics/province/4_Haut-Katanga.png

From Global Information Society Watch 2020, see related country reports for:

Argentina: <https://www.giswatch.org/node/6265>

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India: <https://www.giswatch.org/node/6234>

Nigeria: <https://www.giswatch.org/node/6237>

Footnotes

[1] WorldLoop. (2016, 15 February). ICT e-waste collection expands to Katanga.

<https://worldloop.org/news/ict-e-waste-collection-expands-to-katanga>

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