Case study - Karo Sambhav (Make It Possible): Working with manufacturers to create an e-waste ecosystem in India

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Project / Programme	Karo Sambhav (Make It Possible)
Region / Country	Gurugram, Haryana, India
Website	https://karosambhav.com/home
Circularity	Sustainable e-waste management ecosystem; e-waste value chain; producer responsibility; proper disposal; behaviour change.

Overview

Karo Sambhav is a producer responsibility organisation working since 2017. It focuses on collaborating with enterprises and enables them to close their material loops by designing and implementing extended producer responsibility (EPR) programmes for e-waste. Karo Sambhav's India e-waste programme was launched in partnership with International Finance Corporation, which is part of the World Bank. The objective of the collaboration was to address critical gaps in the market and develop a locally relevant ecosystem for responsible collection and recycling of e-waste with the end goal of mobilising private sector investment in the e-waste industry. The India e-waste programme focuses on awareness raising, capacity building and knowledge exchange in the e-waste sector.

About the project

- waste is a rising global phenomenon which requires urgent attention. According to theGlobal E-waste Monitor, 53.6 million metric tonnes of e-waste were produced in 2019 and India occupied the third place in the list of largest producers of e-waste that year. Only 17.4% of total e-waste was being recycled globally. This number falls to only 2% for India through formal channels. Because of this, the E-waste (Management) Rules were brought into force in India in 2016, and set targets for producers to fulfil their e-waste management obligations.

The Karo Sambhav programme started with a pilot project in May 2017 and is ongoing. It provides services to producers and manufacturers of electrical equipment in order to help them fulfil their EPR commitments under the E-waste (Management) Rules of 2016. It has also created channels which involve stakeholders across the value chain, including consumers, bulk consumers, waste pickers and aggregators. At the same time, it is working with retail and repair shops to help them build sustainable and legal ways of disposing of waste.

It has five programme areas: the Waste Picker Programme, the Waste Aggregator Programme, the Repair and Retail Shops Programme, the Bulk Consumer Programme, and the Karo Sambhav School Programme, which creates awareness on critical environmental issues, including on e-waste.

The key stakeholders engaged in the programme include 17 producers and manufacturing companies of electronic goods (like Apple, Dell, HP, Toshiba, etc.). Karo Sambhav has helped them fulfil their collection targets. The other key stakeholders are schools, repair shops and e-waste workers such as waste pickers, who are engaged in an unorganised sector. The programme buys e-waste from informal e-waste collectors so that they can improve their livelihoods.

In August 2017, it launched its first awareness-raising initiative, and by March 2018 the programme had successfully completed EPR targets for its producer members.

A sustainable approach

The programme has proved to be sustainable in terms of bringing a circular approach to information and communications technologies (ICTs). It has also proved to be sustainable in terms of scalability and replicability. It has managed to create a country-wide presence in its programme, which is helping in achieving a circular economy. It is now providing its services across 29 states and three Union Territories of India.

In the first two years of the programme, Karo Sambhav successfully collected over 6,000 metric tonnes of e-waste and sent it for responsible recycling.

Positive results

All five programme areas of Karo Sambhav have yielded positive results. The Waste Picker Programme has enabled informal waste pickers to become formalised as a part of the take-back channel and it also provides financial

incentives to collect e-waste. The Waste Aggregator Programme has helped e-waste aggregators in legitimising their business, as per the E-Waste (Management) Rules 2016. Karo Sambhav's Repair and Retail Shops Programme works with these shops to help them become a part of the authorised producer take-back channelisation system and strengthen the e-waste ecosystem. The Bulk Consumer Programme offers fair prices for the acquisition of e-waste. Through financial incentives and capacity building, the programmes have helped to make e-waste workers sustainable.

Its School Programme was run in 40 cities across 29 states and two Union Territories. It covers every state of India, which is remarkable. Over 1,21,932 students, 2,312 teachers and 1,156 schools participated in the programme in 2017-2018. This programme is designed to deploy contemporary pedagogical practices in the classroom to develop the skills of real-world problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, communication and ICT competencies. The curriculum, consisting of a toolkit of activities, is intended for class five onwards. It focuses on creating awareness on critical environmental issues including e-waste and inspiring students to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours in their daily lives. The programme is designed to create an environmental movement in schools with teachers playing a leading role. The School Programme is an important behaviour change method. Schools were chosen to be part of the programme because of the potential that change in the critical thinking of students can bring long-term awareness and create a cohort of youth who carry an environmentally responsible approach as future leaders of society. Empowering students with the knowledge of e-waste management can bring a social change and students can influence their families with the same thinking.

Conclusion

Karo Sambhav faces several challenges, including that a number of stakeholders like producers and recyclers are not fully convinced of the role of a producer responsibility organisation.

Another important challenge is for Karo Sambhav to find a way to access e-waste from informal collectors on the ground at affordable prices in order to sell to recyclers and thus create a place for itself in the e-waste market. This is a balancing act, because it is also necessary not to pay the informal collectors associated with Karo Sambhav too little for their e-waste, forcing them to rethink their relationship with the programme and decide to sell directly to the recyclers themselves.

Nevertheless, Karo Sambhav does appear to be achieving its aim of creating a better ecosystem that is sustainable at all levels. In its short existence, the programme has worked with 1,214 schools, 1,007 repair shops, 520 bulk consumers, 1,528 waste aggregators and 2,274 waste pickers across the country, and aims to increase its presence.

References and further reading

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