



Children and Digital Dumpsites: WHO Report

Why in News

The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) in its recent report “**Children and Digital Dumpsites**” has underlined the risk that children working in informal processing are facing due to discarded **electronic devices or e-waste**.

- There are as many as **18 million children** (as young as five years) and about **12.9 million women** work at these e-waste dumpsites every year.
- The e-waste from high-income countries is dumped in the middle- or low-income countries for processing every year.

Key Points

▪ About the E-waste:

- **E-Waste** is short for **Electronic-Waste**. It is the term used to describe old, end-of-life or discarded electronic appliances.
 - It majorly includes electronic equipment, completely or in part discarded as waste by the consumer or bulk consumer as well as rejects from manufacturing, refurbishment and repair processes.
 - It **contains over 1,000 precious metals and other substances** like gold, copper, lead, mercury, cadmium, chromium, polybrominated biphenyls and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

▪ Volume of E-waste:

- **Global Scenario:** According to the **Global E-waste Statistics Partnership**, the volume of e-waste generated is surging rapidly across the globe.
 - About **53.6 million tonnes of e-waste** was generated in **2019**.
 - **Only 17.4%** of this e-waste **was processed** in formal recycling facilities. The **rest of it was dumped in low- or middle-income countries** for illegal processing by informal workers.
 - This is because of the **rise in the number of smartphones and computers**.
- **Indian Scenario:**
 - According to the [Central Pollution Control Board \(CPCB\)](#), India generated **more than 10 lakh tonnes of e-waste in 2019-20**, an increase from 7 lakh tonnes in 2017-18. Against this, the e-waste **dismantling capacity has not been increased from 7.82 lakh tonnes** since 2017-18.
 - In 2018, the Ministry of Environment had told the tribunal that **95% of e-waste in India is recycled by the informal sector** and scrap dealers unscientifically dispose of it by burning or dissolving it in acids.

▪ Impact of Working at Digital Dumpsites:

- **On Children:** The children working at these ‘digital dumpsites’ are more prone to

improper lung function, deoxyribonucleic acid damage and increased risk of chronic diseases like cancer and cardiovascular disease.

- They are less likely to metabolise or eradicate pollutants absorbed.
- **On Women:** Several women, including expectant mothers, also work there. Processing e-waste exposes them as well as their children to these toxins, which can lead to **premature births and stillbirth.**
- **On Others:** The hazardous impact of working at such sites is also **experienced by families and communities** that reside in the vicinity of these e-waste dumpsites.
- **Management of E-waste (International Convention):**
 - **Basel Convention on the Control of the Trans-boundary Movement of Hazardous Waste, 1992.**
 - Originally the [Basel Convention](#) did not mention e-waste but later it addressed the issues of e-waste in 2006 (COP8).
 - The convention seeks to ensure environmentally sound management; prevention of illegal traffic to developing countries and; building capacity to better manage e-waste.
 - The **Nairobi Declaration** was adopted at COP9 of the Basel Convention. It aimed at creating innovative solutions for the environmentally sound management of electronic wastes.
- **Management of E-waste in India:**
 - **Producers:**
 - The government has implemented the [E-waste \(Management\) Rules \(2016\)](#) which enforces the **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).**
 - Under EPR principle the producers have been made responsible to collect a certain percentage of E-waste generated from their goods once they have reached their “end-of-life”.
 - **State Governments:**
 - They have been entrusted with the responsibility for maintaining industrial space for e-waste dismantling and recycling facilities.
 - They are also expected to establish measures for protecting the health and safety of workers engaged in the dismantling and recycling facilities for e-waste.
 - **Recycling of E-waste:**
 - [India's first e-waste clinic](#) for segregating, processing and disposal of waste from household and commercial units has been set-up in **Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.**

Way Forward

- Most of the e-waste is recycled in India in unorganized units, which **engage a significant number of manpower.** Recovery of metals from Printed Circuit Boards (PCBs) by primitive means is a most hazardous act.
- **Proper education, awareness and most importantly alternative cost effective technology** need to be provided so that better means can be provided to those who earn their livelihood from this.
- A holistic approach is needed to address the challenges faced by India in e-waste management. **One approach could be** for units in the unorganized sector to concentrate on collection, dismantling, segregation, whereas, the metal extraction, recycling and disposal could be done by the organized sector.
- A **suitable mechanism** needs to be evolved to include small units in the unorganized sector and large units in the organized sector into a single value chain.

Source: DTE

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