

Women, E-waste and Technological Solutions to Climate Change

WSIS Forum
May 25th, 2015

Lucy McAllister
Amanda Magee
Benjamin Hale



Overview

- I. Introduction
- II. Technical Arguments/Proposals
- III. Human Dimensions of E-waste
- IV. E-Waste is a Women's Issue
- V. Return to Justice: The Case for Inclusion
- VI. Objections and Concerns

I.

Introduction

Argument

Technological Fixes May Compound Existing Burdens

**TECHNOLOGICAL
SOLUTIONS TO
CLIMATE CHANGE**



consumption



**EXISTING
TECHNOLOGY**



E-WASTE



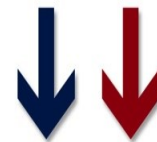
**INFORMAL
RECYCLING
MARKETS**



open-air burning

**HEALTH
IMPACT**

secondary exposure



**PREDOMINATELY
IMPACTING
WOMEN/CHILDREN**

Justice Concerns

- Focus on upstream concerns:
 - Backward-looking culpability
 - Forward-looking responsibility
 - Distribution of benefits and burdens
- Little focus on downstream concerns
 - Cut across mitigation, adaptation, and remediation

Why focus on downstream?

- Policy tends to focus on macro and not micro concerns
- MDCs are likely to choose technical solutions
- LDCs are likely to only be able to respond to these solutions
- Overall worry: May compound one injustice with another

II.

Technical Arguments/Proposals

Three Main Arguments

- Economic viability
- Political feasibility
- Institutional plausibility

III.

Human Dimensions of E-Waste

Human Dimensions

- E-waste: byproduct of electronic products
- Many toxic chemicals in solar cells & electric car batteries:
 - Lead, Mercury, PVC
 - Cadmium, Selenium, Beryllium
 - Silicon tetrachloride

Where does it go?

- Often sent to LDCs
 - Legal, illegal, disguised as “donations”
 - Burden shifting: MDCs to LDCs
 - Poorest workers are invisible
- Basel Convention (1989/1992)
- Only Haiti, Afghanistan, and US have not ratified it.

Burden Shifting

Toxic Colonialism?

IV.

E-Waste is a Women's Issue

Women's Issue

- Stigma associated with doing waste work
- Families are hierarchical
- Women are “lowest of low”



©2009 Alex Hofford



©2008 Basel Action Network (BAN)

Morbidity, Mortality, Fertility

- Cancer, anemia, fetal toxicity, etc.
- Reduced fertility, low birth weights
- Congenital anomalies
- Long lag time
- Children in workplace
- Irony: flexibility of workplace



©2008 Basel Action Network (BAN)

Also affects the kids



©2008 Basel Action Network (BAN)

V.

Return to Justice

Recognition vs. Distribution

- Many possible approaches
- We focus on contractualism

Recognition vs. Distribution

We can apply contractualist test:

- “Given the fact that we are in this relationship, could all parties reasonably accept the benefits and burdens?”
- “Could all of us reasonably accept this if it were proposed as the subject of unforced, informed agreements?”

- Egalitarian, non-aggregating
- Apply to workplace and to home

VI.

Objections

Objections

Many objections and concerns addressed in paper, but I will focus on one here.

- **Technological solutions may be the only option**

Thank you!

Questions?

LUCY D. MCALLISTER

mcallisl@colorado.edu



University of Colorado
Boulder