Women, E-waste and Technological Solutions to Climate Change

WSIS Forum
May 25th, 2015
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
Technological Fixes May Compound Existing Burdens

TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

EXISTING TECHNOLOGY

consumption

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
- Only Haiti, Afghanistan, and US have not ratified it.
Burden Shifting
Toxic Colonialism?
E-Waste is a Women’s Issue
Women’s Issue

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

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Also affects the kids

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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?
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