

# DownToEarth 25 years

FORTNIGHTLY ON POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

Down To Earth is now also in Hindi [Visit here](#)

**DownToEarth** PROUD PARTNER



### 3rd Annual AID & INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM AFRICA SUMMIT

27-28 February 2018  
Safari Park Hotel  
Nairobi, Kenya  
[Africa.aidforum.org](http://Africa.aidforum.org)

300+ attendees | 70+ speakers | 50+ partners

BROWSE BY TAGS

FOCUS TAGS



INDIA

WORLD

**COP 23**

AFRICA

CLIMATE CHANGE

AIR

AGRICULTURE

Home | Economy | **News**

Subscribe to our Newsletter enter email address

Subscribe

Facebook 267 Twitter Pinterest LinkedIn

## Recycling the bin

Kankana Das @kankanadas121 | Monday 15 February 2016

Several initiatives are demonstrating how the informal e-waste recycling sector can be formalised

### RELATED

ELECTRONIC WASTE

RECYCLABLE WASTE

E-WASTE  
(MANAGEMENT AND  
HANDLING) RULES OF  
2011

WASTE MANAGEMENT

HAZARDOUS WASTE

MUNICIPAL SOLID  
WASTE

INFORMAL SECTOR

RAG PICKERS

ECONOMY

INDIA



Women ragpickers gather for a training session in Ahmedabad (Photo: GIZ/VOSTRY)

Savita Devi (name changed), a municipal solid waste worker in Ahmedabad city, used to earn Rs 1,500 per month. When she joined an initiative of GIZ India in 2012, where she was trained to collect e-waste, her income rose to Rs 2,500 per month. "We are now able to hire private tutors to educate our children," says a ragpicker. The initiative has also led to the channelisation of e-waste to authorised dismantling and recycling units. The project is run by SEWA-Gitanjali Cooperatives, which is a joint collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) India and Microsoft Corporation.

India generated around 1.7 million tonnes of e-waste in 2014, says a UN report. E-waste is a complex waste stream as it contains rare and valuable components and materials worth recovering. But it contains toxic materials which can harm human health and the environment. A study done by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in Moradabad's informal e-waste recycling units revealed heavy metal contamination in water and soil samples. The contribution of waste workers in the informal sector has long been neglected and ignored, though they are considered key economic actors, who feed the recycling market. They lack formal recognition, safe livelihoods and dignity. Worse, they are exposed to dangerous tox-ics that can damage to human health.

### Reinventing the cycle

The Ahmedabad initiative has been able to channelise about 4,950 kg of e-waste each year. "Women workers need to devote only two hours weekly, compared to earlier days when they used to spend the entire day sorting and collecting waste," says Varsha Ben of SEWA.

The success of e-waste management and handling lies in the integration of in-formal sector into the formalisation loop. In Kolkata, non-profit DISHA has initiated the process of formalising informal units so that after dismantling, the waste can be sent to the authorised recyclers. "This has helped secure the livelihood of workers," says Sasan-ka Dev, secretary of DISHA.

E-waste recycling—from the household to the dismantling unit—is a three to four tiers process. At present, apex traders control e-waste trading in the informal business market. DISHA worked with middle level collectors of e-waste and also tied up with an authorised recycler in Tamil Nadu. In the last 18 months, about two tonnes of discarded mobile phones and its parts have been collected and channelised to the authorised recycling unit. Now, ragpickers get immediate monetary returns, and prices on products are fixed, which otherwise would have been the apex trader's decision.

In Pune, a public-private partnership, under the EU Switch Asia-WEEE recycle project, has integrated 192 informal small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Here, the Pune Municipal Corporation fulfilled its responsibility, under the e-waste rules, by providing support in the form of land to set up a collection facility.

In Bengaluru, SAAHAS, a non-profit, provided support to establish four SMEs, who have established linkages with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to handle 40 tonnes of e-waste. The initiative is achieving sustainability through the establishment of business cycles—SMEs are buying e-waste and re-selling it to larger authorised recyclers. "To make a business case, the producers, manufacturers, recyclers and the government need to encourage decentralised set ups of e-waste collection points run by companies, civil society-led organisations or cooperatives to formalise in-formal workers," says Rachna Arora, senior technical adviser, GIZ.

Though the E-waste Rules, 2011, and the draft E-waste Rules, 2015, lay the responsibility of managing e-waste on the producers and manufacturers, under the principle of Extended Producer Responsibility, manufacturers are not implementing it, as the existing rules lack the scope for bringing the informal sector into the loop of formalisation (see 'The impediments...').

These initiatives have shown how the informal e-waste sector can be streamlined and formalised. But more importantly, these initiatives have recognised the role of waste workers, creating new livelihoods, improved working conditions for women and enhanced social and educational status for their children.

### The impediments...

*...to formalise the informal e-waste sector*

The E-WASTE (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011, says that producers/manufacturers of electrical and electronic equipments (EEE) and Waste EEE (WEEE) have to set up authorised collection centres to ensure maximum collection of e-waste, under the Extended Producer Responsibility, following which they have to ensure environmentally sound disposal of the collected waste. However, producers/manufacturers failing because of:

- Lack of collection centres;
- Non-recognition of the vast informal sector, who can become the last mile connect to collect e-waste from individual households; and,
- Absence of mass awareness programmes on the need to manage discarded e-waste.

Other reasons include lack of authorised recyclers who undertake end-to-end recycling.

**Move from news to views and get in-depth reports on issues that matter to you, every fortnight.**

[Subscribe now »](#)

*We are a voice to you; you have been a support to us. Together we build journalism that is independent, credible and fearless. You can further help us by making a donation. This will mean a lot for our ability to bring you news, perspectives and analysis from the ground so that we can make change together.*

---

## BLOG

[SEE ALL](#)

---

### E-waste disposal: what India can learn from Norway

Majority of brands operating in India do not have a tangible responsibility to handle waste that is generated by their goods at end of life stage

---

### New e-waste draft rules promise a broader scope

The 2015 rules boast of clarity and lay down the responsibilities of various stakeholders in clear terms

---

## DTE RECOMMENDS

---

### Manage e-waste the EU way

Proposed legislation makes producers responsible for recycling

---

### Mobile app shows users the hazards of e-waste

Consumer demand for the 'next big thing' and ready supply by electronic companies are the primary causes behind e-waste generation

---

### 'Tsunami' of e-waste rolling out over the world

Annually, one million people die from occupational poisoning, says UNEP chief

---

## IEP RESOURCES

**E-waste (Management) Rules, 2015**

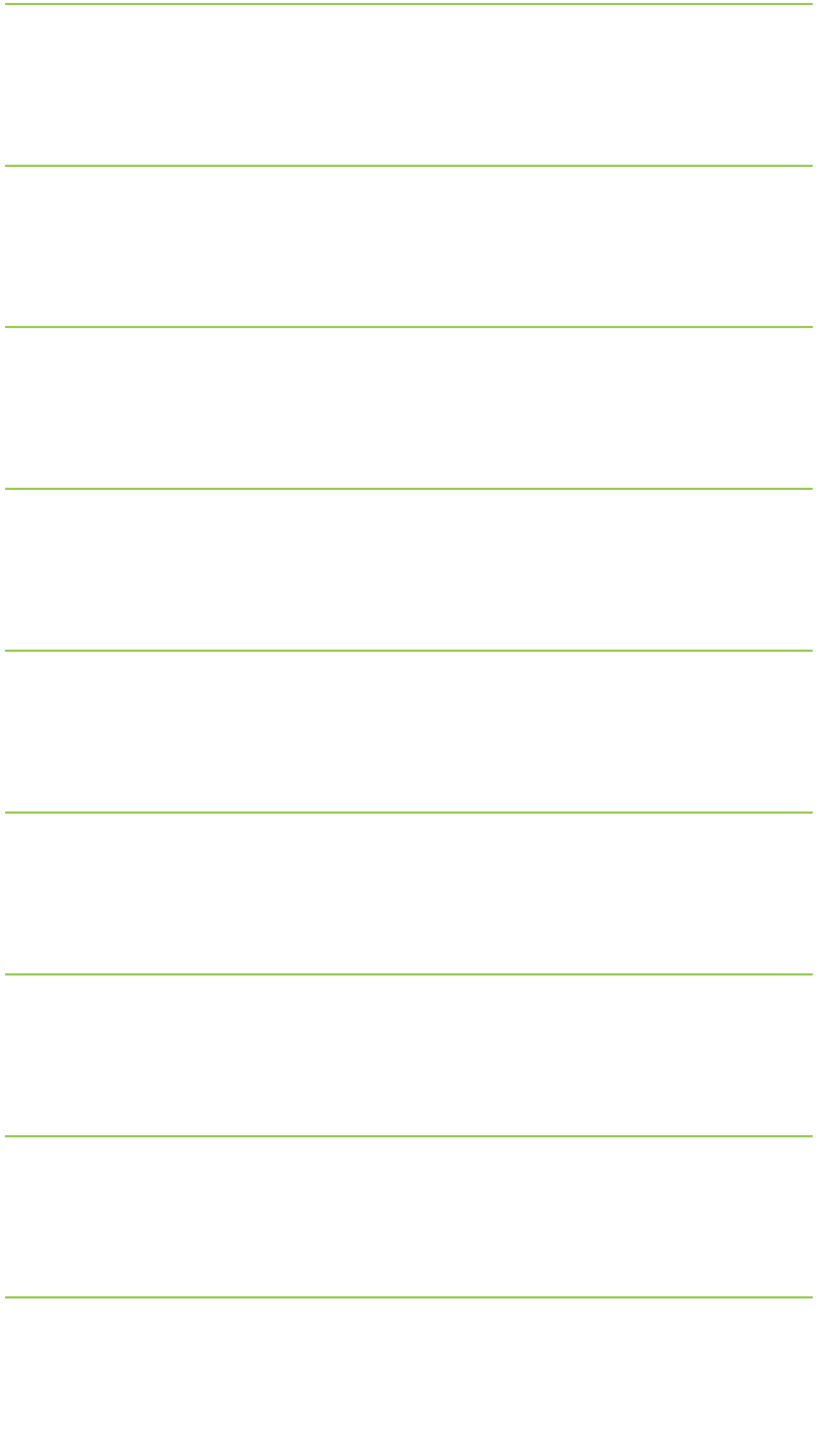
**Time to reboot**

**Guidelines for environmentally sound  
management of e-waste**

---

**SPECIAL  
COVERAGE**

SEE ALL



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

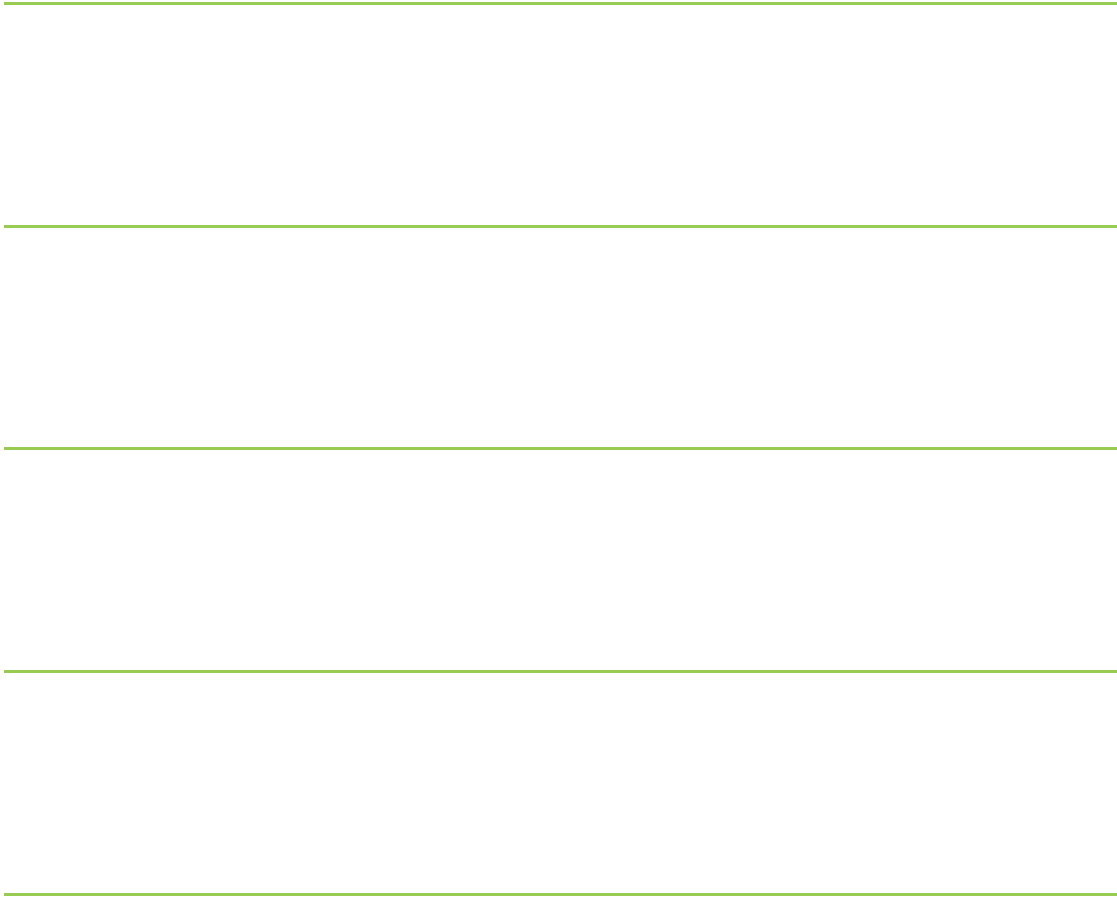
---

---

---

---

---



CONVERSATIONS

Post Your Comment

Comments are moderated and will be published only after the site moderator's approval. Please use a genuine email ID and provide your name. Selected comments may also be used in the 'Letters' section of the Down To Earth print edition.

Name

Email

Write Your comment

Post

INDIA

WORLD

CLIMATE CHANGE

FOOD

HEALTH

LIFESTYLE

WATER

News

Coverage

In - Depth

DTE Blogs

Videos

Photo Gallery

Publications

Cartoons

About Us

Contact Us

Privacy Policy

Terms and Conditions

Refunds & cancellations policy