



# A broad alliance to tackle e-waste

## Microsoft and GIZ are optimising the recycling chain for e-waste in India



### The challenge

Managing electronic waste is a sensitive issue. As resources become increasingly scarce, it is vital that crucial components are salvaged, but recycling is expensive. As a result, around the world, less than half of all waste is currently reused – and where recycling does take place, it happens through mostly dubious routes, frequently ending up in developing countries. The impact on individuals and the environment is fatal: without a properly organised recycling system, untrained individuals dispose of electronic waste, exposing themselves to sometimes toxic vapours when equipment is destroyed, while lead, mercury and other heavy metals are allowed to pollute the environment.

India receives a particularly large proportion of the world's electronic waste, and although the country has official recycling facilities, most waste recycling takes place in the informal sector.

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*'The greatest advantage we have had from the partnership with GIZ has been its links with local government through its country offices – and, of course, its international expertise. Working with GIZ, we have created a new model – something we've been unable to do with any other partner.'*

Pranshu Singhal, Head of Sustainability, Microsoft India

Thousands of waste collectors – most of them women – gather discarded electronic equipment on a daily basis and sell it for minimal prices to intermediaries, who dismantle the equipment and sell on individual components. Ultimately, the equipment ends up in the hands of India's large informal scrap dealers, making it more difficult to dispose of e-waste safely and sustainably.

### The solution

Microsoft Corporation India Private Ltd. is well aware of the potential – as well as the problems – of the Indian market. The company is keen to increase e-waste recycling – and to boost its image as a leading performer in the area of business sustainability. In 2013, Microsoft embarked on a development partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH as part of the develoPPP.de programme. develoPPP.de was set up by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to foster the involvement of the private sector at the point where business opportunities and development policy initiatives intersect.

The partners' aim was to make recycling of electronic waste in two Indian cities more efficient and more socially and environmentally sustainable. The scheme involved local partners: the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the environmental organisation DISHA played a crucial role in the success of the project.



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## Our services

In the pilot cities of Kolkata and Ahmedabad, the partners helped to establish links between the waste collectors and small businesses on the one hand and the official recycling companies on the other. The female collectors have direct access to private households, one of the major sources of waste, so they were trained by experts to explain to residents how to recycle electronic waste properly. When they visit households, the women collect unwanted electronic equipment but also pass on information about how to dispose of it properly. They sell the waste they collect to official recycling companies, receiving a fair payment.

The women also target small intermediaries. These often acquire scrap at low prices, start the dismantling process and sell components on to dubious wholesalers. The project partners realised that intermediaries can actually offer their e-waste to the official recycling companies without any significant loss of income and have been persuading them to do so. Links have also been forged with more than 1,100 repair shops in Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

The project has also got children and young people involved. Collection points for discarded electronic equipment have been set up in 100 schools in each of the two cities, and each school has received a case of materials from Microsoft. Among other things, the students use the materials to trace the 'life story' of a mobile phone. They also undertake visits to observe the work of the waste collectors and to see for themselves how much e-waste ends up on illegal waste tips. Meanwhile, more than 250 young people have been trained as 'e-waste ambassadors', forming flash mobs to encourage local communities to rethink their approach to e-waste disposal and recycling.

Although the development partnership has now come to an end, Microsoft is continuing its efforts and is keen to recruit as many new partners as possible. Its initial cooperation with 200 schools

is being expanded: the company is now in discussion with 4,000 further schools. Meanwhile, with the help of GIZ contacts, the Indian Government has now become involved and is seeking to make e-waste part of the training that teachers receive.

## Impacts and results

200 waste collectors – mostly women – now know about the health risks and financial potential of their work and are taking the idea of sustainable use of resources into their local neighbourhoods. Over 1,100 intermediaries will now deliver their scrap to official recycling companies. Meanwhile, children at 200 schools have been taught about e-waste, and 264 young people have been trained as e-waste ambassadors and now function as multipliers for the project.

### At a glance

<b>Duration</b>	1 March 2013 – 31 October 2015
<b>Country</b>	India
<b>Objective</b>	To set up a viable recycling chain for old mobile phones and other electronic waste and raise awareness among the population of a more sustainable lifestyle.
<b>Partners</b>	Microsoft Corporation India and GIZ
<b>Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 200 waste collectors have taken part in e-waste training and are now helping raise popular awareness.</li><li>• Sustainable relationships have been established with more than 1,100 repair shops.</li><li>• 264 young people have been trained as 'e-waste ambassadors'.</li><li>• Many other stakeholders, including municipalities, environmental associations and universities, are learning more and becoming involved.</li></ul>

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