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Need of the Hour Moving towards E-Waste Management

Need of the Hour : Moving towards E-Waste Management

December 01, 2010

By Sankalita Shome

You just got a new phone and now you have a couple of spare mobiles at home. These days, there is hardly anyone who would appreciate a hand-me-down phone. The average life of electronic products is diminishing exponentially and it is no longer fashionable to say that you have been using the same electronic product for the last several years.

The rapidly changing and increasingly affordable technology means that your latest electronic purchase is already on the path to becoming obsolete.

But what of the fast growing pile of electronic waste? The hazardous materials that are used to make the electronic items, can adversely impact the environment if not disposed properly. What do you do with your old mobile, television set and computer when you make a purchase to upgrade your electronic toy? Recycling of electronic waste is still an alien concept in Egypt, especially in the face of growing consumerism.

The Spirit of Youth, an NGO that works with the Zabaleen in Manchiyet Nasser, has seized the initiative, and for the past year has been conducting an electronic waste management project.

The project involves many things. First is the e-waste management, which Egypt produces a lot of; secondly it also focuses on community development, and in this instance it is gender-based.

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Nine women from the zabaleen community have been trained by a computer engineer on how to dismantle and re-assemble personal computers and they are using this training to work on computers donated by individuals and corporations.

The working parts are re-assembled to create refurbished computers that are fully operational and are sold at very low prices to low-income neighborhoods.

"This means that the refurbishment of computers achieves two things - it successfully uses the electronic waste and it increases the personal computers' penetration, contributing to development and education for the low-income neighborhoods," explains Majd Madina, Project Director with the Spirit of Youth.

These refurbished computers are sold for as little as LE150, as opposed to a brand new computer, which would at the minimum, retail for LE1,000. The entire sales proceeds are shared by the zabaleen women, providing them with a source of livelihood.

Aside from the parts that can be used for assembling functional computers, there are those that are of no use in making the refurbished computers, but can be recycled. These parts, like metal, plastic and others are removed and given to the recycling workshops in Cairo.

Lastly, there is the hazardous electronic waste that cannot be recycled and is dangerous if left out to decompose. Since Egypt does not have an e-waste recycling plant as yet, the waste is piled up and kept till such time when arrangements can be made for its proper disposal.

The project is ready to receive mobile phones too, but currently they are only stored - their recycling and/or repairing is to begin in January.

The NGO is trying to reach out to the people, to encourage them to donate their discarded electronics, through newsletters and other means. Mobnil and the American Chamber of Commerce have partnered the project and donated a number of computers.

But still, there is lack of awareness and not enough donations to fill this gap; the project has plans to launch the "Revive" program in partnership with Future Generation Foundation (FGF). The FGF will help in procuring the electronic machines and also in marketing the refurbished computers.

Additionally, the process of certification as MAR-Microsoft Authorized Refurbishment is also underfoot,

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under which Microsoft will provide the project with Microsoft Windows and Office free of cost, to use on the refurbished computers. Microsoft will also provide e-waste management, a much-needed boost by using their network to reach out to a large number of corporate houses to inspire them to contribute and donate to the e-recycling initiative.

In the end, for any such initiative to succeed, the government stamp of approval and complicity is of the utmost importance. Recognizing this, Madina and Ezzat Guindy, Executive Manager and Founder of Spirit of Youth have been working with the Minister of Communication and IT. "They are throwing in their lot with us and this will give us legitimacy as well as greater visibility," elaborates Madina.

There is nothing to hold you back - take that step towards a cleaner environment.

If you have a computer or a mobile phone that you no longer need and want to dispose of, call (02) 23434851 or Email spirit.ofyouth@yahoo.com.

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