Brussels / Dübendorf, 17 February, 2009

Empa, HP and DSF unveil conclusions

Next steps of project to tackle electronic waste in Africa

HP together with the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and Empa today unveiled the first results of a pilot project to tackle the problem of electronic waste (e-waste) in Africa. This initiative was carried out in South Africa, Morocco and Kenya and has allowed HP to gather vital information on how African governments, organizations and society are dealing with the rising problem of e-waste management, as well as test solutions on the way forward.

The information and experience gathered in this project, which also included contributions from local organizations and NGOs, will support the launch of the second phase of the project, which aims at engaging corporate and government partners to further extend e-waste management programs to other countries and tackle the problem of e-waste in the entire continent.

«HP has a responsibility that starts with the design of a product and goes right through to its disposal and we take that responsibility very seriously», commented Klaus Hieronymi, Director, Environmental Business Management, HP EMEA. «We see these projects in Africa as both providing employment opportunities for local communities and as a step towards a sustainable solution for tackling electronic waste in Africa.»

The pilot project in Cape Town represented the main focus of this Africa-wide project with encouraging results. The facility processed approximately 60 tones of electronic equipment, generated an income of around $14,000 from February to November 2008 and created direct employment for 19 people. The project also seeks to incorporate informal processing activities that have proved highly effective in dealing with waste, by transforming them into sustainable and environmentally sound operations.

«Our research has shown that a solution is at hand and demonstrated some of the incredible entrepreneurial skills we can tap into in the informal sector in Africa», said Project Manager and Empa researcher Mathias Schluep. «By providing tools and training we have removed potential environmental and health problems that can be caused by handling e-waste incorrectly. What's more, we have created a channel to full employment for creative minds in the informal sector.»

«Information technology represents a real opportunity to boost the African economy, but the question of what we do with old equipment once it no longer works is an important one», said Cissé Kane from DSF. «This project has helped us move some way to closing the loop by providing a model for safe and efficient treatment and disposal of e-waste.»

The assessment studies conducted in Morocco and Kenya provided a clear picture of the e-waste management landscape in those countries, particularly on the legislation in place, local awareness and behavior, infrastructural needs and total amount of waste generated. For example, the study in Kenya has demonstrated although the country is producing 3,000 tones of e-waste per year, with an increase of 200% per year, there is a clear lack of legislative framework and practical e-waste management systems. To address this, the study recommends that a mechanism to raise funds for the expensive process of e-waste is established, and measures to raise public awareness are taken.

The learnings and recommendations that resulted from these studies will now be considered in the second phase, which aims to assess sustainable business models in electronic waste recycling and deploy medium to large infrastructure pilots in these and other countries.

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Photos of the project are available under: www.flickr.com/photos/16963160@N08

Stored for proper recycling: Disused computers in the pilot plant in Cape Town / South Africa.

From informal garbage collection to professional e-waste management: Pilot plant in Cape Town.

About the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

The Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) is the only international organization entirely dedicated to reducing the digital divide. Its objective is to equip the developing world with the means to access the knowledge society. Through access to ICT and valuable content, the DSF works at community level to promote the development of marginalized populations. The DSF collaborates with local and national authorities, the private sector, international organizations and NGOs, as well as civil society. More information on the DSF is available at www.dsf-fsn.org/

About Empa

Empa is a multidisciplinary research institute for material science and technology within the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) domain. Empa is specialized in application-oriented research and development, as well as in services to help solving demanding problems in the fields of sustainable materials science and technology development. Empa's Technology and Society Lab analyses the impacts of technological developments on society and the environment and hosts among other activities the technical monitoring team for the Swiss e-waste management system. Empa is leading the Swiss Global e-waste Program, which aims at building capacities for e-waste management in developing economies (www.ewasteguide.info). More information on Empa is available at www.empa.ch

About HP

HP, the world's largest technology company, provides printing and personal computing products and IT services, software and solutions that simplify the technology experience for consumers and businesses. HP completed its acquisition of EDS on Aug. 26, 2008. More information about HP (NYSE: HPQ) is available at http://www.hp.com/.