

6. TOXIC WASTE (PHOTOGRAPH 18)

The photo shows the raw materials and the final product: a mobile phone like the ones any one of us could have. How many of you have a mobile phone? Could you go a whole month without it? How many mobiles have you had before? What do you do with old or broken mobile phones? At the end of its useful life, where will it end up? What will happen to the 3T+G minerals in the phone?

Old computers, mobile phones, electronic devices, MP3 players, tablets, USB sticks, printers and more. Some devices break, others are outdated because of technological progress or planned obsolescence or simply a new model comes out with better features. This means that mobile phones form part of electronic waste. The term 'electronic waste' refers to all the electrical and electronic products that have reached the end of their useful life and are therefore thrown away.



There are many reasons why this excess of electronic waste is produced but, without doubt, we must mention these two key reasons: rampant consumerism and planned obsolescence (i.e. designing devices intentionally so that they do not last very long). Responsible consumption of mobile phones can help extend their useful life and reduce their implications in mineral extraction in DRC.

To get an idea of the scale of the problem, every European citizen produces, on average, 14 kg of electronic waste each year. Although forbidden by the Basel Convention, a lot of this waste is sent to certain African and Asian countries, as though they were products for the second-hand market, when in fact they end up in giant landfills full of waste technology. The human

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and environmental costs of these landfills are enormous, given that the devices contain highly toxic substances for human health and the ecosystem, such as mercury, cadmium, chrome and the chlorofluorocarbons that damage the ozone layer. One of the most notorious landfills is in the Agbogbloshie district of Accra, the capital of Ghana.

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