Editorial comment

Dispelling common misconceptions to improve policy outlook in developing countries

Martin Oteng-Ababio
University of Ghana
moteng-ababio@ug.edu.gh

Abstract

There is no question that the proliferation of electronic and electrical equipment, which animates the information and communications technology (or technologies) revolution were always going to kick up some dust. Not least because the infrastructure needed to manage the end-of-life products are non-existent. Consequently, the large quantities of used electrical and electronic devices such as personal computers, mobile telephones and entertainment electronics that are disposed of are growing rapidly. This development has consigned the e-waste industry to a landmine of myths, incorrect assumptions and half truths, ranging from those rooted in a misreading of the informal activity to the truly bizarre. This editorial piece highlights some commonly held myths about the e-waste management practices in Ghana that are perpetuated by different stakeholders and actors in the sector for different reasons. The paper cautions that only an unbiased, in-depth understanding of the complexities and multidimensional nature of the e-waste industry among the various stakeholders – public officials, informal operators and non-governmental organisations can generate a mutually beneficial governance framework.

- Misconceptions perpetuate myths that feed perceptions about the e-waste economy.
- Myths can misguide policy response to e-waste management.
- Myths narrow the scope of e-waste discussions to an environmental niche.
- Debunking myths is necessary to formulate a holistic policy response.

Background information

The world today faces the two extremes of the electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) industry: while the production, use and trade in EEE has proliferated, available methods of managing e-waste end-of-life products, particularly in developing countries, are not

as effective as they need to be. The deficiency has created fertile grounds for spreading partial information and over-generalizations full of contradictions, stereotyping, and misconceptions. Such dramatizations concentrate on the aspects of e-waste activities (e.g., storage and burning) which are the most highly visible spatial imprints. Thus, criminalising the informal e-waste sector masks its actual contributions to livelihoods and poverty reduction, and hurts in devising appropriate policy interventions. An underlying and often amplifying challenge that results from the misconceptions is a lack of reliable, consistent, and comparable data on the e-waste sector which would form a baseline for any robust decision making. Thus, clarifying and debunking the myths is paramount for demonstrating the contribution e-waste could make towards improving livelihoods and addressing the poverty and economic challenges in developing countries.

Though e-waste management policies are generally non-existent in most developing countries, some African countries are now developing some regulations, albeit with implementation and operational challenges. The emerging e-waste legislations technically mimic those from the developed countries where: (i) challenges of informal collection and recycling are less relevant, (ii) basic infrastructure for the appropriate waste management is present, and (iii) consumers and industry are generally aware of waste management practices.

At individual country level, at best, the emerging policies in Ghana present the use and available management e-waste as 'traditional' or 'primitive', which is in conflict with formal development objectives. Switching to 'formal recycling' or banning informal production, trade, and use of used electrical and electronic equipment have become a dominant approach for addressing the e-waste 'problem'. However, due to the lack of viable alternatives, such policies, often unclear and conflicting, die at birth. (Bisschop, 2013).

Using a review of the literature and more than a decade of personal research experiences with e-waste recycling in Agbogbloshie, this editorial piece highlights some commonly held myths that are perpetuated by different stakeholders and actors in the e-waste sector for different reasons, and which frustrate the quest for more sustainable and environmentally friendly e-waste recycling practices. These myths include, for example, that Agbogbloshie, Accra is the largest electronic waste dump in the world, and that every year, about 250,000 tons of sorted out computers, smartphones, air condition tanks and other devices from a faraway electrified and digitalised world end up in Agbogbloshie illegally. This commentary examines why these myths are disputable, and how the widespread belief of these myths has continue to misguide policy responses to the quest for sound e-waste management policies.

Suffice it to state from the onset that new approaches on how to address the e-waste menace are emerging. However, the successful implementation of these approaches is also

dependent on clarifying some misinformation, and debunking harmful misconceptions about the industry. Thus, two objectives motivate this commentary. The first is to extract the e-waste story from that of the more general hazardous waste. In my view, addressing the e-waste parochially and consolidating the information into ambiguous terms such as 'toxic waste' continues to distort information, perpetuate negative attitudes and misguide policy interventions.

The second is to debunk the myths about e-waste that have materialised over time, largely due to the blended approach of handling the information on informal e-waste recycling. Ultimately, the lack of cohesion over what is to be believed and not believed about e-waste perpetuates confusion and contributes substantially to the absence of appropriate policy responses in Ghana and beyond. This piece is intended to stimulate the adoption of a more positive and balanced attitude toward informal e-waste practices to help craft well-informed policies. It will also inspire more targeted and better designed research on e-waste in the global south and in the process, clarify misconceptions and blatant biased reportage.

Information biases - policy space nexus

In most developing economies, having a voice in the media space is important for gaining power and legitimacy in policy shaping processes. Ghana is no exception. For example comments on how wicked policy processes are either avoided by some media personalities or drastically reframed and reshaped to fit reporters' norms and interests. Also discusses the four trends in media reportage - personalisation, dramatisation, fragmentisation and an authority-disorder bias, which he calls information biases, that simplify complex governmental issues. Concludes that in most human endeavours, there is always a bias towards negativity, especially with environmental issues.

Typically, personalisation bias refers to the framing of stories in terms of human interest, thus bringing a human face or emotions into the presentation (Bennett, 2009). The dramatisation bias concerns an emphasis on crisis and conflict in stories rather than on continuity and harmony (Patterson, 2000). In such scenarios, reporters tend to describe the situation at hand in terms of conflicts, with winners and losers. The process where reporters selectively isolate stories from one another and from the larger context is termed fragmentisation bias.

In such 'episodic' framing, issues are described in terms of specific events instead of placing them in their more general context. Further, situations preoccupied with order, where authorities are questioned whether they are capable of establishing or restoring the order, are known as authority-disorder bias (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Lastly, the tendency for the news to be more negative in general reflects a negativity bias.

Discussing the different type of biases comprehensively is beyond the scope of this editorial piece. But be that as it may, one could see how such biases influence the continuous distortion of what is known about informal e-waste practices in Agbogbloshie, and how such distortion perpetuates negative attitudes and misguides policy interventions. The fact is that people make choices individually, but their decision-making process is influenced strongly by the social infrastructure in which they live and work as well as their collective norms – the collectively agreed rules on how to behave in mainstream society. To that extent, the individual becomes an important actor in creating a sustainable society. It also implies that the overreliance on (mis)informed power of the individual may lead to poor policy results.

Such appear to be the case of the newly enacted e-waste policy, Act 917 in Ghana, passed in 2016 to regulate e-waste trade and management. The form and content of the policy smacks of an externally-induced policy prescription, as it mimics the Basel Convention (Pathak et al, 2017). Such a 'coerced response' has visible exclusionary command-and-control features, an anomaly that raises doubts about the policy's cohesiveness and suitability for its intended purpose (Bisschop, 2013). A similar failed policy was passed in 2008; i.e. the 'Energy Efficiency Regulations 2008' (LI 1932). The LI made it illegal to import any used refrigerating appliance into the country. This was followed by the 'Energy Efficiency Standards and Labelling Regulations, 2009' (LI1958) as amended in LI 1970.

In spite of these laws, obsolete and discarded refrigerating appliances still fill streets of the major cities in Ghana, due to disturbingly one-sided sensational media reports, often riddled with half-truths, inconsistencies, and subjective opinions, unsupported by empirical evidence. Sees such policies as a product of instances where official agencies are lobbied by environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs) to promulgate 'sound environmental laws', and communities empowered to resist the use of their environment as an uncosted sink for locally unwanted land use (LULU) projects. Rather, it complicates the worlds of work processes, networks, and outcomes and perpetuates an open hostility towards the e-waste industry.

Making poor people pay to support wealthy peoples' business or consumption pattern is not really what I believe is sustainability. A number of interdisciplinary studies show that policy formulation on human actions and decisions is shaped by a range of economic, political, psychological, technological, and social factors that are outside the control of the individual actors. This makes it compelling and worth addressing the misconceptions that a place like Agbogbloshie has been unduly and continuously subjected to. This is imperative since if the public does not understand a policy (or even worse, misunderstands it), they may accept or reject it based on misinformation. As rightly noted in earlier studies, the quest to optimally manage e-waste for improved

socio-economic and environmental benefits is frequently delayed not only for economic reasons but sometimes societal hesitancy due to misinformation may be a crucial factor. (Stacey, 2021)

Also noted that sometimes, the challenge stems from pessimistic accounts and debates over conceptual issues such as the (dis)proportionate creation of (il)legal dumped waste, thus creating imaginary landscapes of risk, which are socially peripheral, isolated, powerless, and degraded, and mask other innovative practices. Such pessimistic accounts championed mainly by Environmental Non-governmental Organisation (ENGOs) who seek outright e-waste trade ban and promote a single version of recycling hurt the policy space, and as earlier noted by Oteng-Ababio and Maja, (2020) only an unbiased, in-depth understanding of its complexities and multi-dimensional nature can generate a mutually beneficial of sustainable governance framework.

The Agbogbloshie Mythoi in focus

'When public opinion on policy is driven by misconceptions, refute them'. The statement was my conclusion when I participated in a debate on Ghana's e-waste management policy. The debates generally alternated between a too-neat bimodal pattern describing 'dumping of waste by the rich "developed" nations in poor "developing" ones', and what terms 'mixed optimism drawn from win–win notions of trade'. In my opinion, the continuous mythological (mis)representation of the e-waste industry has an implicit cost for e-waste regulatory frameworks. This exemplified Ghana's Act 917—which took nearly a decade to be implemented (2008–2016), but whose end product still remains patently unclear. My contention is that e-waste recycling encapsulates an economically motivated chain of activities which requires significant downstream investments. It also requires engaging professionals with the appropriate competences and mindset to devise regulatory frameworks that situate the informal sector, as pertains in Agbogbloshie, within the overall national development framework.

Geographically, Agbogbloshie is an urban area in Ghana's capital, Accra, housing a vegetable market, a scrap metal yard, a large slum, an industrial area, and a household waste dump (see Figure 1). Unfortunately, the area has assumed notoriety in the environmental sustainability discourses in the last three decades. The situation is particularly challenging with e-waste, and the so-called illegal dumping of electronics from the global North. Undeniably, Agbogbloshie is a thoroughly polluted place and the people working in the recycling trade in particular are exposed to serious health and safety risks (Stacey, Grant and Oteng-Ababio, 2021).

The difficulty however relates to why media portrayals focus almost exclusively on the area as an electronic waste dump, drawing on the dramatic imagery of burning cables

and tires for the extraction of copper, which forms only part of the activities of the scrap metal yard. A quick online search of "Agbogbloshie + e-waste" reveals the epistemological complexity of describing the scrap yard, often erroneously referred to as the largest e-waste dump in the world, a depiction consistently reiterated on social media and in documentaries and articles.

Such depiction is empirically inaccurate, and only indignifies the area. It makes the complexity of Agbobgloshie to be lost in the Western media and renders invisible the many economically innovative works taking place in the area, and how these are generating much needed jobs for the youth and contributing to an important repair and recycling culture. The latest in a long line of documentaries and publications to 'dramatise' and sensationalise Agbogbloshie is Welcome to Sodom, a 2018 documentary directed by Austrian filmmakers Florian Weigensamer and Christian Krönes. In its title, and in its portrayal of 'this apocalyptic society', the film perpetuates the tendency to mythologise a reality that needs no exaggeration. In the process, the film gets most relevant facts wrong. Consider the logline of the documentary:

> Agbogbloshie, Accra is the largest electronic waste dump in the world. About 6,000 women, men and children live and work here. They call it "Sodom". Every year about 250,000 tons of sorted out computers, smartphones, air conditions tanks and other devices from a faraway electrified and digitalized world end up here. Illegally. Cleverly interwoven, the destinies of the various protagonists unravel the complex story of this apocalyptic society. Their very personal inner voices allow a deep insight into life and work at this place – and of Sodom itself. And you can be sure – it will most probably be the final destination of the smartphone, the computer you buy today.

As already asserted emphatically, when public opinion on policy is driven by misconceptions, then there is an imperative need to refute them, and this is what this commentary seeks to do by examining a couple of statements in the logline above:

Myth 1: [that] Agbogbloshie, Accra is the largest electronic waste dump in the world.

A cursory visitor to Agbogbloshie, after reading most of the sensational media stories and documentaries, will wonder whether he/she had not used the wrong geographical compass. On the ground, Agbogbloshie accommodates a residential area, yam and vegetable markets – notably the onion market, industrial enterprises, a football field, a household waste dump, and a scrap metal yard (see Figure 1).

The Odaw river and the Korle Lagoon form two natural boundaries. At the other side of the Odaw river lies Old Fadama, locally known as Sodom and Gomorrah. Old Fadama is an informal settlement and houses one of the most important yam markets in the metropolis.
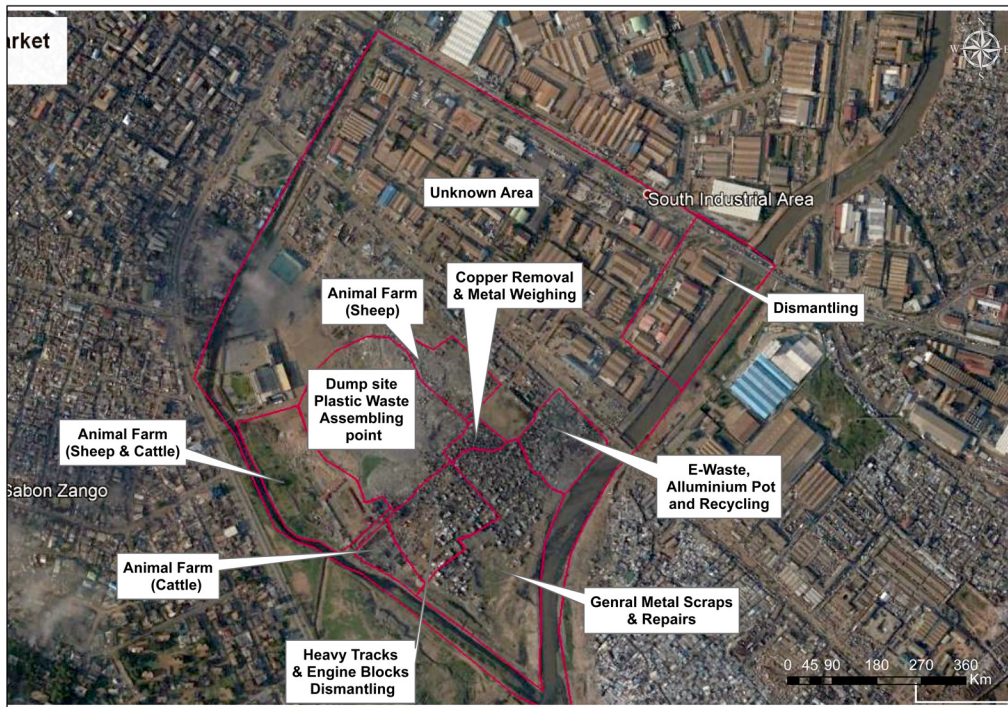
Figure 1

In reports and documentaries, Old Fadama and the scrap metal yard are often erroneously presented as one place, resulting in descriptions such as "the slum of Agbogbloshie is the world's largest e-waste dump" by journalists, photographers, environmentalists, film makers, and even a music video maker (e.g., Grant and Oteng-Ababio, 2021).

While the descriptions of Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama are often linked to the dumping of e-waste, the history of the area shows that its development pre-dates e-waste (Stacey 2021). The establishment of important wholesale food markets in the early 90's (onions; yams; etc), resulted in an influx of traders, workers and trucks. Newcomers started settling in Old Fadama, until then a small formal settlement and considered spiritual land by the Ga people.

The part of Agbogbloshie where 'e-waste' is dismantled is not an e-waste dump, but a scrap metal yard. All kinds of machinery and household equipment, cars, buses, bicycles, generators, air conditioners, computers, etc. are taken apart for scrap and spare parts. The above notwithstanding, the myth is often repeated that Agbogbloshie is the largest e-waste dump in the world, despite the fact that there are many other sites in the world, actually specialised in e-waste, that are many times larger.

For example, Guiyu in China, employed at its peak 100,000 people and covered 52 square kilometres. Meanwhile, GIZ, the German Organisation for International Cooperation

which has an office and training centre on the site, estimates Agbogbloshie's size as 0.15 km² (Hedemann and Johannes 2019). Other sizes mentioned are 2.5 km², 0.5 km², 0.1 km², 0.08 km², and 0.3 km². Compared with other informal scrap metal yards, such as Guiyu in China, which was about 52 km² during its most active period, it is a relatively small site.

Myth 2: Every year, about 250,000 tons of sorted out computers, smartphones, air conditioners and other devices from a faraway electrified and digitalized world end up here illegally.

Paucity of quality and reliable data has been the bane of policy developmental efforts of most developing economies including Ghana. This section challenges the amount of e-waste supposedly entering Agbogbloshie. The lack of reliable data has also set in motion series of dramatisations and one of the most interesting sets of numbers, especially when considering the size of Agbogbloshie and the words used to introduce these numbers, such as "illegal", "dumped", and "imported".

Not only are these clearly mythologised presentations, but also they generally ignore the large amount of domestically produced e-waste. For example, the Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development Policy resulted in the accelerated import of ICTs, aided by tax-exemptions for imported computers and other computer equipment. As a result, the imports of used computers rose from 1500 tonnes in 2004 to 10,300 tonnes in 2011. In the Greater Accra Municipal Area (GAMA), the source of most e-waste entering Agbogbloshie, 90% of the households have a mobile phone, 85% a television, 82% a fan, 78% an electric iron, 62% a fridge, 50% a VCD/DVD/MP3 player, and 24% a laptop or PC (2014 living conditions).

In spite of these large potential sources of e-waste generation, many studies continue to preach the e-waste dumping propaganda with clearly outrageous numbers. The highest number was "hundreds of millions of tons" of e-waste dumped, an impossible statistic, as the global amount of e-waste produced was 50 million tonnes in 2017, but nevertheless still used. The *Guardian* newspaper published in 2014 a photo report by Asare Adjei, who mentions that 50 million tonnes of e-waste were dumped in Agbogbloshie (2014). In the "Welcome to Sodom" documentary, the directors mention that 250,000 tonnes of e-waste end up illegally at Agbogbloshie.

Indeed, many resources cite 215,000 tonnes of imported e-waste ending up at Agbogbloshie. This number may be a misrepresentation of the 2011 Ghana E-waste Country Assessment, which mentions that in 2009, Ghana imported up to 215,000 tons of electrical and electronic equipment (EEE), of which 30% was new and 70% second-hand EEE. GIZ, which provides training and health services to e-waste workers at Agbogbloshie, estimates that 17,000 tonnes of imported and domestically produced scrap ends up at Agbogbloshie every year (Hedemann and Johannes 2019).

Sovacool mentions that Ghana is the fifth largest e-waste importer in the world (2019). Be that as it may, the fact remains that if 250,000 tons of illegally imported e-waste was brought into the scrap metal yard every year, this would amount to 35,000 computer monitors or 14,000 air conditioner units or 4 million mobile phones every day. Clearly, everyone spending a few days in Agbogbloshie knows that these numbers are absurd.

Meanwhile, prior studies by the Global E-waste Monitor 2020 (Forti et al. 2020), noted that Ghana produced 53,000 tons of e-waste in 2019. Further, a report by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published in 2019, stated that the Accra-Tema corridor alone, housing 10% of Ghana's population, was producing 59,000 tons of e-waste in 2015 (Holland Circular Hotspot 2019). The lack of reliable data, plus the fact that about 95% of all e-waste handling in Ghana takes place in the informal sector (Grant and Oteng-Ababio 2016), makes it impossible to establish how much discarded EEE enters Agbogbloshie, how much is repaired, how much is sold as spare parts, and how much is recovered and sold as recycled materials (copper, aluminium, plastic, printed circuit boards (PCBs), etc.

Incidentally, but not surprisingly, none of the sensationalised reports highlights materials and products leaving Agbogbloshie. While there are many different numbers available for the amount of e-waste entering Agbogbloshie, there are hardly any numbers for the materials (spare parts, repaired products, recycled materials, new products from recycled materials) that leave site. Indeed, the notion of dump, often used in the context of Agbogbloshie, suggests a place where things are left behind – they are not even managed, as in a landfill.

However, evidence from the field revealed the results of repair, recycling, and re-use activities, though it is quite difficult to estimate how much recycled materials left Agbogbloshie. Nevertheless, the World Bank (2015; 41) suggests that the e-waste economy contributed an estimated US$416 million dollars in 2015 to the Ghanaian economy, while Prakash et al. (2010; 38) quoted an equivalent of 0.55% of Ghana's GDP (Oteng-Ababio et al. 2018)albeit in harsh urban environment. The availability of figures on e-waste, imported, dumped or domestically generated ending up in Agbogbloshie, contrasts with the lack of numbers on recycled, repaired or refurbished e-waste leaving Agbogbloshie.

Mythoi 3: mask innovations and hurt policy compliance.

The myths about the Agbogbloshie e-waste situation have been busted before. While Welcome to Sodom may be well-intentioned – especially as it lifts the profile of minorities in the context of poverty in Ghana – it is not well informed. In fact, it is a good example of what Bennett called dramatisation bias. Its images reinforce common

cultural attitudes and values among an audience that has no opportunity to check the validity of the statements made in the documentary. The uninformed statements made in the documentary, combined with imagery that does not distinguish between the scrap metal yard, the slum, and the household waste dump next to the yard, presents an uncomplicated objectionable image of Agbogbloshie as an e-waste dump.

Calling Agbogbloshie an apocalyptic society suggests the vulnerabilities experienced by its inhabitants and workers are somehow uniquely appalling. They are not. The vulnerabilities experienced by the people of Agbogbloshie are terrible in and of themselves, but they are morally unbearable precisely because they are a normal part of the global economic system that sustains modern over-consumption. There are many slums in the world and even more small scrap metal yards where electronics and other equipment and machinery are dismantled with rudimentary tools, with resulting health and safety risks for the workers involved, including children.

By portraying Agbogbloshie as an 'apocalyptic society', the film may even contribute to risks for those vulnerable people for whom it clearly seeks to generate sympathy: the Ghanaian authorities have shown in the past that they are not unwilling to use foreign media attention for 'the largest e-waste dump in the world' as the justification to forcefully evict people from Agbogbloshie. By perpetuating these myths, the film is unlikely to help the people working there.

The film presents e-waste as a 'First World' problem, ignoring the fact that Ghanaians consume large amounts of electronics, and that the repair and recycling of these electronics is not only an important economic activity, but a major contribution to sustainable consumption. Admittedly, e-waste is a huge global problem. It is not a problem that stops by guilt-tripping some consumers in rich countries.

Ghana needs practical and maintainable electronic waste policies, which recognise the importance of the informal repair and recycling sector and secure the health and safety of the people involved in this trade. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and the intentions of those preaching a geography of vulnerability and advocating for the prohibition of e-waste recycling are no exception. This commentary supports the position that e-waste is a secondary product and therefore any policy initiatives regarding its management which are developed in an empirical vacuum are likely to suffer from a lack of compliance.

Contents of this issue

This edition of *Ghana Social Science Journal* addresses various models used in social sciences to represent public policy development processes and their outcomes. Each of the individual articles suggests how a particular model of policy formulation

constitutes a useful interpretive lens that can guide reflection and action leading to the production of healthy public policies. The first article by Ablo and Boadu examines how liberalisation policies constitute a significant instrument for African governments to catalyse development through foreign direct investment (FDI) and private sector led job creation. They reckon that unemployment has been a major development challenge in sub-Saharan Africa, and evidence abounds that governments' efforts to address the canker have yielded very limited successes.

Using data from the Lower Volta Basin, their paper examines foreign direct investment in the agricultural sector. Their results revealed that FDI in agriculture injects capital into the national economy and produces positive spillovers, including youth employment, technology and skills transfer. They also noted that poor wages, precarious working conditions, perceived exploitation, leakages, and dislocation of smallholder farmers are evident. In their conclusion, they opined that investments in the agriculture sector must suit local socio-cultural conditions to minimise micro adverse outcomes.

The second article assesses the state of selected formal institutions and agencies within Ghana's juvenile justice system as part of a larger study that assessed Child Panels in the country. The findings expose the abject sordid state of the institutions and agencies which reduces them to a state of gross inefficiency and under-utilization. This paper highlights the fact that despite numerous studies that have identified similar challenges, lack of appropriate policies and actions has stalled all attempts to address them. The paper urges scholars to move beyond assessing the efficiency of the system to a focus on exploring how the system can realistically be transformed in light of the numerous challenges facing it and the socio-political realities in which it operates. It is also a call to the responsible public authorities to take policy action to address the challenges.

The third article provides empirical evidence on the association between personality and childbearing in an African context using the dimensions of the Big Five factor model - extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience and agreeableness. Applying the negative binomial and zero-inflated negative binomial regression models to data obtained from the World Bank's survey on Skills toward Employment and Productivity (STEP) for Ghana, the authors found that after controlling for age, education, spouse and employment status, three of the personality traits, namely conscientiousness, openness to experience and agreeableness, have significant associations with number of children. Openness to experience is negatively associated with number of children in both males and females. However, conscientiousness and agreeableness are, respectively, negatively and positively associated with number of children, but only in the male sample. Extraversion and stability were not significantly associated with number of children even when the models were estimated without the control variables.

Based on a systematic analysis of data collected from four rural communities in the Wa West district, the fourth paper explores the possibility of synergising mitigation and adaptation policy strategies at the local level since both seek to arrest the menace of climate change. The paper exposes the weakness in the solitary strategy adopted by local farmers to expand their socio-economic activities within fragile eco-systems. It argues that in building a sustainable 'immune system' for climate-induced vulnerabilities, local farmers need to balance their adaptation and mitigation strategies by searching for mutually supportive actions and trade-offs. The final paper is a study undertaken by Songsore in September 2009, prepared for the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) as part of its eight country case studies on urbanisation. Titled "The Urban Transition in Ghana: Urbanization, National Development and Poverty Reduction", the paper noted that though the rate of urbanization in the developing world is proceeding at a fairly comparable rate as that of the industrial nations, the rate of population growth of cities in developing countries is rather unprecedented.

Concluding remarks

Broadly, this editorial comment highlights the fact that Agbogbloshie has suffered years of research, writing and photographing, which over-concentrate on the negative environmental and health effects of e-waste. Conspicuously, the narratives so far are characterized by myths, half-truths and indeed, misinformation. What is obvious is a situation where complex realities are being lifted from their context and pasted onto other meanings and frameworks, thereby reproducing an image apparently grounded in real life, whereby Agbogbloshie has risen to epitomize 'ground zero' of an e-waste apocalypse. This commentary argues that recirculating such mischaracterisations and myths is out of kilter and could be a result of a multiplicity of motivations which, if not corrected, could potentially serve various agendas and influence the policy choices pursued.

The commentary cautions against how the continuous depictions of marginality and misery at the locale can contribute to sustaining marginalisation. It demonstrates how the policy space and initiatives in Ghana have exhibited continuous inconsistencies including, for example, erroneously tilting policy response toward formalizing and elevating formal firms, and promoting technological solutions. The author concurs with Rekdal (2014) who aptly noted that the attainment of truth is not because a claim has been scientifically proven; rather, the appearance and status of truth emanates from repeated citations in multiple sources and the claim's gradual insertion in ways that often render it the desired point of replication for future studies. The story of Agbogbloshie shows evidently that those on the lowest rungs of the urban economic ladder meld bodily expenditure, social aspiration and material breakdown to forge fragile futures and to format urban space. Therefore, until informality and its culture and practices are incorporated properly into holistic policies, the quest for sustainable cities and society will be unattainable.

Reference

Adusei, A, Arko-Mensah, J, Mdzodzomenyo, M., et al. (2020). Spatiality in Health: The Distribution of Health Conditions Associated with Electronic Waste Processing Activities at Agbogbloshie, Accra. Annals of Global Health 86(1). Electronic waste workers, Ubiquity Press: 31. http://www.annalsofglobalhealth.org/articles/10.5334/aogh.2630/, accessed July 25, 2020.

Afena, A. (2012). Engineering a Millennium City in Accra, Ghana: The Old Fadama Intractable Issue. Urban Forum, DOI 10.1007/s12132-012-9155-

Afroz, R., Masud M. M., Akhtar R., and Duasa J. B. (2013). Survey and analysis of public knowledge, awareness and willingness to pay in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – a case study on household WEEE management. J Clean Product, 52:185–93.

Amoyaw-Osei, Y., (2011) Ghana E-Waste Country Assessment. http://www.basel.int/portals/4/basel%20convention/docs/ewaste/e-wasteassessmentghana.pdf, accessed March 30, 2019.

Bennett, W.L. (2009) News. The Politics of Illusion. New York: Pearson Longman.

Bisschop, L. (2013). Go with the e-waste flows. The governance reality of illegal transports of e-waste in a European trade hub. In P. van Duyne, J. Harvey, G. Antonopoulos, K. von Lampe, A. Maljevic_, & J. Spencer (Eds.), Human dimensions in organised crime, money laundering and corruption (pp. 393–424). Wolf Legal Publishers.

Davis, A. (2007) The Mediation of Power: A Critical Introduction. London: Routledge.

Filippo, P, (2019) Europe's Electronic Waste Ends up at This Toxic Landfill in Ghana. Euronews.https://www.euronews.com/2019/07/27/europe-s-electronic-waste-ends-up-at-this-toxic-landfill-in-ghana, accessed July 25, 2020.

Ghana Statistical service, 2014

Grant and Oteng-Ababio, 2012

Heacock, M, Kelly, C, B. Asante, K. A. et al. (2016) E-Waste and Harm to Vulnerable Populations: A Growing Global Problem. Environmental Health Perspectives 124(5): 550–555. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4858409/, accessed July 27, 2020.

Hedemann, Philipp, and Veronika Johannes (2019) Kick-off at the Scrapyard. https://akzente.giz.de/en/artikel/kick-scrapyard, accessed July 27, 2020.

Horner, R. (2016) A new economic geography of trade and development? Governing South-South trade, value chains and production networks. Territory, politics, governance, 4(4): 400-420.

Huo, Xia, Lin Peng, Xijin Xu, et al. (2007) Elevated Blood Lead Levels of Children in Guiyu, an Electronic Waste Recycling Town in China. Environmental Health Perspectives 115(7): 1113–1117. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1913570/, accessed July 27, 2020.

Iyengar, S. and McGrady, J. A. (2007) Media Politics. A Citizen's Guide. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Minter, A, (2015) Anatomy of a Myth: The World's Biggest E-Waste Dump Isn't. Shanghai Scrap. http://shanghaiscrap.com/2015/06/anatomy-of-a-myth-the-worlds-biggest-e-waste-dump-isnt/, accessed April 29, 2018.

Minter, A, (2019) Second-hand: Travels in the New Global Garage Sale. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Oteng-Ababio, M., van der Velden, M., & Taylor, M. B. (2020). Building policy coherence for sound waste electrical and electronic equipment management in a developing country. The Journal of Environment & Development, 29(3), 306-328.

Patterson, T. E. (2000) Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy – and What News Outlets Can Do About It. Boston, MA: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Rehdal, 2014

Schiller, J (2015) Inside the Hellscape Where Our Computers Go to Die. Wired, April 23. https://www.wired.com/2015/04/kevin-mcelvaney-agbogbloshie/, accessed July 24, 2020.

Sovacool, B. K., Hook, A., Martiskainen, M., Brock, A and Turnheimn B (2020) The Decarbonisation Divide: Contextualizing Landscapes of Low-Carbon Exploitation Toxicity in Africa. Global Environmental Change 60: 102028. https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0959378019305886, accessed July 25, 2020.

Stacey, P. 2021. The Law and Development Encyclopedia: Local authorities / cities in the Global south. Chapter in Book. Edward Elgar.

Stacey, P., Grant, R. & Oteng-Ababio, M. 2021. Food for thought: Urban market planning and entangled governance in Accra, Ghana. Habitat International, 115.

Strömbäck, J. and Shehata, A. (2007) Structural Biases in British and Swedish Election News Coverage. Journalism Studies, 8:5 pp798–815.

van der Velden, M., Taylor, M. B. and Oteng-Ababio M (2019) Sustainable Product Lifecycles: A Systemic Approach to the Regulation of E-Waste. In P. 9. Berlin.

Weigensamer, Florian, and Christian Krönes (2018)   About – Welcome to Sodom. http://www.welcome-to-sodom.com/?page_id=279, accessed July 25, 2020.

EPA, 2016