



◀From left: Prof. Osibanjo and Dr. Benebo at the event in Lagos.

## Taming the hazards of e-waste

**W**HAT is e-waste? It is discarded electrical electronic appliances.

These include computer equipments, television sets, photocopiers, feminine machines, handsets, disused handset batteries, battery chargers, and other audio and visual electronic devices.

They are in most cases exported to developing countries under the guise of bridging the digital divide, low cost of used electrical electronic equipment (EEE) and high rate of obsolescence, due to rapid innovations.

Though the idea behind the exportation is to cushion the poverty level in developing nations, experts have discovered that e-waste has led to the death of many Nigerians due to over exposure to the several hazardous components of those items.

Understanding the dangers of e-waste, world leaders at a conference in Switzerland tagged Basel Convention, banned the dumping of e-waste in developing countries.

Nigeria, a signatory to the agreement reached at the convention, is yet to fully implement the decision.

This, among other things, was the reason behind a capacity-building workshop for the informal sector on environmentally sound management of e-waste in

By Tajudeen Adebajo

Nigeria.

The workshop, organized by Basel Convention Coordinating Centre for Africa, University of Ibadan, in conjunction with the University of Northampton, United Kingdom, was held at the Olumo Hall of Airport Hotel, Ikeja, Lagos, last Tuesday.

At the event, Minister of the Environment, Mr John Odey admitted that though the components in e-waste are valuable if properly processed and re-cycled, but harmful to human health and the environment if not properly handled.

"Recycling of e-waste," Odey said, occurs in the informal sector particularly in developing countries.

"However the recycling processes are mainly carried out by vulnerable groups particularly women and children, and the unemployed youths who use crude processing methods," he added.

Represented by the Director-General, National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), Dr Ngeri Benebo, the Minister of Environment stated that human exposure to these toxic substances can have serious health implications.

"What we have lost is unquantifiable because one billion dollars cannot buy a human life. People are die-

ing just like the case we have in Zamfara, you can't quantify in monetary terms the lives lost in that state and what was it —exposure to Lead could cost. These electronic equipments we are talking about also contain lead, so we should be careful. Agile young men die of cancer as a result of mishandling of hazardous chemicals," he said.

Director, Basel Convention Coordinating Centre for Africa, Professor Oladeti Osibanjo, while commenting on e-waste recycling, stated that it is an expensive business which can only succeed, with a good collection system.

Osibanjo, a professor of Analytical and Environmental Chemistry, University of Ibadan, also identified dearth of raw materials and appropriate law encouraging its collection, as part of major factors militating against recycling in the country.

"In Europe, when you buy a phone, people are paid for take back. When you take it back, they give you something, but because there is no such thing in Nigeria, people would rather keep their computers in their homes because there are no incentives," he said.

Osibanjo stressed that without a proper collection system, e-waste recycling is not going to work. He said there are no raw materials to fill the recycling plant in

**'The components in e-waste are valuable if properly processed and recycled, but harmful to human health and the environment if not properly handled'**

the country, which he said the government should start looking into.

Speaking with *The Nation*, Dr Margaret Bates from the School of Science and Technology, Centre for Sustainable Wastes Management, the University of Northampton, United Kingdom said there is no recycling infrastructure in place in Nigeria which she said is affecting the proper functioning of the e-waste system.

Bates said their aim is to work with people in Nigeria on how to handle the waste effectively so as to reduce the dangers involved.

"People should be taught how to gather raw materials and make more money with